

Cover Band

By

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A man afraid of life on the stage finds his own way to be
the man he wants to be.

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EXT. OPEN MIC NIGHT BAR - NIGHT

Establish on bar. Sounds from an average singer/songwriter are heard as the shot pushes from the established shot, to a dusty chalk board sign on the facade on the building that reads "Tuesday Night - OPEN MIC NIGHT - 7pm til close".

INT. BACKSTAGE AT DAILY GRIND OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Average singing and guitar playing are louder and echo as a visibly nervous man, James CHELERE (Shell-a-ray), late-20s/early 30s stone-faced kid in a man's body, stands in the shadow of the curtain waiting to go on stage. He is very AVERAGE and FORGETTABLE in the way he looks.

James peeks from behind the curtain to size the audience. This bar isn't crowded, but to him, it may as well be Madison Square Garden. His cheeks puff as he breathes faster and deeper. He looks behind him at the pleasing green glow of the exit sign. Sudden applause. Startled, he snaps back to look at the stage. The announcer, BARRY, 40s, a rotund happy guy, steps past James and approaches the mic as the performer steps off stage and into the audience.

BARRY

Give him a hand! That was Dan
Sherwood, a new comer. Next up we
have one of our regulars, Curt
Capelle!

A handsome, fit, confident man, CURT CAPELLE, late-20s/early 30s, walks past James, startling him again. The man proceeds to go on stage and gives Barry a hug in the process. Barry exits the stage and walks past James. Curt begins soaking up the spotlight on stage.

CURT

Thanks Barry. Hi everyone. Welcome
back, you familiar faces. I've been
listening to a lot of... [continued
rambling]

As the focus stays on James, Curt's voice matters less, fading out. James just sees the results: The audience enjoying his presence. Laughter. Clapping. Curt is a god. James is startled as someone puts a hand on James's arm. He jolts, then turns around to see Barry.

BARRY

James Chu-ler-ree, right?

James shakes his head, "Yes".

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
It's Chelere, Barry. Chelere.

BARRY
Right. You're up next. Stick around
this time, okay?

James gives a sure, but nervous nod. James can see the green exit sign behind Barry. Barry releases his hand from James's arm, then follows up with a reassuring pat. James looks back out on stage.

JAMES
(whispering to himself)
...stick around, stick around...

The crooner out there now is really good. His guitar playing is simple, but that's all the audience wants. Any sort of confidence James had drains from his face as Curt continues to play.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(whisper/singing)
...stick around, stick....

As Curt finishes out his song, it's followed by roaring applause over a steel door opening, then squeaking to close. James is gone.

CURT
Thanks for coming back out
everyone, and I hope to see those
new faces here again.

BARRY
Give it up for Curt, everybody! As
always, a pleasure Curt.

EXT. A LATE NIGHT WALK AWAY FROM THE BAR - SAME NIGHT

James, with a guitar case on his back, makes the long walk from the left side of the frame, to the right side, in a large wide shot. SHOW TITLE: COVER BAND. The audio over this clip is the announcer mixed with James:

BARRY
Next up we have James Chu-ler-ree.
(beat) James, are you back there?
Well folks, he got us again. In the
meantime, how about another
applause for Curt!

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
(whisper/singing)
...stick around, stick around...

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

Just outside of his apartment, James aggressively fumbles with his keys.

JAMES
(whisper/singing)
...why don't you stick around...

He opens the door with frustration, but after a deep breath, closes it softly - mindful of his neighbors. The change in attitude is obvious as he returns to "hating himself" mode, but still sings to himself.

He flips on the lights. His walls are covered in notebook paper containing a lovely mix of art and song lyrics that have yet to be put to music. Even his lyric sheets seem like they could hang in museums. He ignores it all as if it were beige paint on your own walls.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(whisper/singing)
...stick around, stick around...

He puts down his guitar on a floor stand still in its case, then sits on the edge of his mattress/boxspring combo on the floor, hanging his head between his arms. The singing stops. A moment later, he gets up and grabs a large, five subject college ruled notebook from a stack of them on his bookshelf. He tosses it on the bed, then immediately unsheathes his guitar. He plops back down on the bed and starts strumming. The music carries over to the next scene.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

It's a new early morning. The sun has just peeked over the horizon, and a helmeted James is on his bike with a bag of papers tossing them at doors and doing the occasional hand off to anyone waiting for him to come by. One by one, papers make their way to their rightful owners. What was once a full crate of papers on his bike, now only contains one. He finally slows his bike down, arriving at an average trailer home with a porch.

EXT. SAM'S RENTAL TRAILER - SAME DAY

He leans his bike on the trailer, puts his helmet on it, then grabs that last paper. He hops up the three steps, onto the porch, opens the screen door, knocks. Almost instantly, SAM, late 30s lean aged man in a robe, tank top, and pajama pants opens the door. He hasn't shaved in a while, but it seems to be the look he wants to go for.

JAMES

Good morning. Your paper, sir.

James pushes the newspaper into Sam's chest, giving him no choice but to take it.

SAM

Come on, no one reads these.

James walks past Sam and into the domicile.

INT. SAM'S TRAILER - SAME DAY

Sam's home is a typical trailer, complete with wood paneling and carpet. It's a bit messy, but can still be navigated.

JAMES

Its the only perk I have that I can share with you Sam, so take it. You've never complained before.

SAM

I'm just trying to save you the trouble. I get my news from the internet, like everyone else.

James immediately sits on the couch as Sam trashes the paper. Sam sits in a chair and retrieves his coffee nearby.

SAM (CONT'D)

You're good for more than just papers. Why don't you get a different job that you're too old for - like opening up a lemonade stand? I could use that.

JAMES

I'm done for the day, and you'll be changing oil til the sun goes down.

SAM

I wouldn't know what to do with all of that spare time. Ya want breakfast?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Yeah.

On the table next to Sam's coffee, James observes a coin on the table. "9 months sober". Sam begins to prepare a simple breakfast in the kitchen. The two rooms are only divided by a bar, allowing face to face conversation. Sam begins to undo the bread bag.

SAM

While your job's still viable, you can use the car whenever you want. You know, get off of that bike. What's mine is yours, no questions asked.

Sam loads the toaster with two whites.

JAMES

No Sam, gas, its wasteful - I mean, being green, yeah, but more importantly - there goes a quarter of my earnings in a day.

SAM

How the hell do you afford rent with a job like that?

JAMES

Cheap rent. I got lucky.

SAM

Lucky. Sure. Well, don't blow through that inheritance like I did. *Fuck*. If I had that money back, things would be different. Wouldn't be in this shit hole, you know?

James is uncomfortable with the subject.

JAMES

Speaking of being green, it doesn't take much to recycle these papers.

James gets up, takes the newspaper out from the trash and places it onto the counter. Sam scoops out a piece of coffee cake.

SAM

Comon, you're gonna get coffee grinds all over the place. I don't need these damn things. I walk to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (cont'd)
work - how's that for a
contribution to Mother Earth?

James returns to his seat. The toaster pops as Sam returns the newspaper to the trash. Sam places the toast on the small plate next to the coffee cake.

JAMES
I'm not hugging trees or anything -
I just think its not a bad idea.

Sam opens up the refrigerator.

SAM
You want jelly or butter?

JAMES
Do you have jam? Or preserves?

SAM
What's the difference?

JAMES
Between jam and preserves; or
either of those to jelly?

The refrigerator seems to hums loudly as Sam gives a blank stare awaiting any answer. James grabs his own sweaty shirt; looks down at it.

JAMES
Butter's fine. I guess I've earned
it.

Sam closes the refrigerator and begins to apply the butter.

SAM
Mom's been asking me to send her a
video of you at one of those open
mics you talk about. If I knew
where it was, I probably would have
went.

JAMES
When I'm ready, I'll tell you where
I'll be. But... they didn't put me
on again.

SAM
Again? What happened this time?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

They just ran out of space for me,
that's all.

Sam accepts the new excuse, though he assumes it isn't true. He's done buttering the bread. He adds it to the plate with the coffee cake, then brings it to James. Sam sits back down, by his own coffee and sobriety coin. He picks up the coin and begins to play with it, running it over it fingers.

SAM

So are you going to try again?

JAMES

Sure. But if she just wants video,
we can do that here.

SAM

Nah, she wants to see you in the
spotlight again.

JAMES

I never really was in the
spotlight.

SAM

She's referring to the recitals and
performances from twenty years ago.
That shit counts.

JAMES

She doesn't want to come see for
herself?

SAM

You won't tell us which one you're
playing at. Besides, she lives an
hour away.

JAMES

But she gets her nails done like
twenty minutes from here.

SAM

Yeah, but, she can make
appointments for that.

James shakes his head, confused. Sam leans in, carefully speaking.

SAM (CONT'D)

She doesn't want to make the drive
unless she knows you're gonna go

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (CONT'D) (cont'd)
through with it. So you got a
little stage fright. Hell,
everyone's got it to some degree. I
couldn't do it.

JAMES
It's more than a little stage
fright, okay? I've gotta work on it
on my own. And even if I don't, who
cares?

SAM
Everyone cares. Don't hide where
you're playing, especially from me.
If you don't want me there, don't
tell me you're playing.

JAMES
Yeah, sure.

Sam sits back in his chair.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Is that the nine month coin?

Sam tosses it at James.

SAM
Yep. You wouldn't think something
like a single coin would be so damn
important.

JAMES
You've got something to prove.

SAM
Yeah. I ain't going down that road
again, though. It scares me to
think about it.

JAMES
Yeah.

James tosses coin back at Sam. He catches it.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Don't think about it.

EXT. STREETS NEAR JAMES'S APARTMENT - SAME DAY

James, on bike, makes his way back to his own apartment.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE OF JAMES'S APARTMENT - SAME DAY

You would expect this apartment complex to have been built in the 1970s. Perhaps parts were upgraded in the 1980s, but nothing since then. It's nice enough with average landscaping.

James parks his bike and proceeds to lock it to the stair's railing. While messing with the lock, Curt Capelle walks by holding a box and a duffel bag on his shoulder. He gives James the "cool guy nod". James is quick to return one of his own (which doesn't come off nearly as cool), followed by a look of curiosity.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James sits bedside in a slightly elevated Indian-style manor. Beside him is his guitar. The bag sits on the floor below. He puts a hand on his guitar, then looks at the wall - the wall he now shares with Curt. He gets up, and approaches the wall cautiously.

James puts his ear to the wall. Nothing; not a sound. A while longer. Still nothing.

He turns back to his guitar, then walks back to the bed, sitting down in the same manor. He looks at the "Curt wall" again. He turns back to his guitar, picks it up, strikes the low e-string loudly, then immediately catches it, waiting for a response from the "Curt wall". Nothing.

James goes through his phone. There aren't many names, but there is a "Laura Guidry". He selects it.

JAMES

Laura, hey, it's James. Can I talk
you into coming over for a bit?
(beat) No, everything's fine. It's
just I have a new neighbor.

James looks at the wall during the conversation.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

LAURA GUIDRY, mid-20s, is now on his couch. She looks like the girl next door, wearing scrubs. She has James's guitar on her lap. She plucks the strings, having no idea how to play.

James has his ear to the wall. He then goes to the window, trying to see if Curt is outside of his apartment. He looks back to Laura and back outside intermittently.

JAMES

Okay, so the same plan as last time, then we'll go out.

Laura is not phased by how weird James is. She's more excited about free dinner.

LAURA

Where are you going to take me?

JAMES

Wherever you want. Is it okay to invite Sam?

LAURA

Sure. Have you tried that place downtown, Capital City Cafe?

JAMES

Yes. But we can't go there. I was in their bathroom and one of the cooks took a leak; didn't wash their hands.

LAURA

Maybe he washed them in the kitchen.

JAMES

I'm not prepared to take that chance. What about our usual place?

LAURA

That'll work. (beat) So, what about this neighbor?

JAMES

Oh right, let's pretend we're having a conversation.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
We are having a conversation.

JAMES
One where he can hear us. Let's
have it by the wall here.

James approaches Laura and extends out his hands to her. She takes them. He pulls her off the couch and over to the wall. They both lean on the wall.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Okay, so continue the conversation.

LAURA
How was that open mic night?

JAMES
That wasn't the conversation.

LAURA
Did you go on stage?

James and Laura get a little more quiet than before, given the topic and their distance between each other.

JAMES
They were filled up.

LAURA
So you split?

JAMES
Yeah. Don't judge me. This new
neighbor actually plays there. I
spotted him while he was moving
stuff in.

LAURA
Did he recognize you?

JAMES
Maybe. He gave me that cool guy
nod. You know, like this?

James gives his own uncool version of the cool guy nod, jerking his chin up and down.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You know? So I think he recognized
me.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

I really want to see you play in public. I mean I love the personal concerts, but your mom asked me to try to record you playing on a stage.

JAMES

She's getting to everyone - Asked Sam to do the same.

LAURA

But that's not going to happen.

JAMES

You know me so well.

LAURA

But I'm glad you're trying anyway.

JAMES

Seems like a waste of time.

LAURA

When you leave without playing, it kind of is.

JAMES

I'm only trying because everyone wants me to. Its not like to *need* to do it.

LAURA

When you do... You'll be great.

James smiles warmly; shyly.

JAMES

I don't think this conversation is loud enough for him to hear us.

LAURA

Should I yell it? (yell) OoooH, YOU'RE GONNA BE GREAT!

JAMES

No, no, no. Just... Just start laughing loud.

They both begin to loudly fake laugh. Back and forth, bigger and bigger laughs! James starts HAMMERING on the wall with his fist. More LOUD LAUGHS. Cut to:

EXT. DOORWAY TO CURT'S NEW APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

The door creaks open, revealing James standing behind Laura. Curt's entire vibe is the overly nice, artistically focused hipster.

CURT

Hi, what can I do for you?

LAURA

Hi! We're from next door, and we noticed we were getting a little loud, so we found this to be the perfect opportunity to introduce ourselves and apologize for all of the noise.

CURT

Hey, nice to meet you. I'm Curt, Curt Capelle.

LAURA

I'm Laura, and this is James.

JAMES

Hi, I'm James Chelere.

James shakes his hand the only way he knows how - jerking up to the shoulders, and back down - one time.

CURT

I like that last name. I haven't heard it before. I guess these walls are pretty thick, cause I haven't heard anything. Besides, a little noise never hurts anyone. Which apartment are you both from?

James points while Laura speaks.

LAURA

James is in one sixty four. I'm there from time to time, but he's the only one that lives there.

CURT

Very cool, very cool. I'd invite you guys in, but it's still a mess after moving all day.

LAURA

Oh, no, we just wanted to say hi and apologize about the noise.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

I appreciate that - Laura and James, I'm sure I'll see you guys a lot around here. Thanks for stopping by!

LAURA

Sure! Bye.

JAMES

Goodbye.

Curt closes the door, as Laura turns back to James. She smiles playfully, and James knows whats coming next.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I know, I don't say much.

LAURA

(Dual Dialogue)

You don't say much.

JAMES

This is why I need you.

LAURA

(Dual Dialogue)

And that is why you need me!

James looks at her, as he cracks a goofy smile.

JAMES

So can we go out now?

LAURA

We can.

Laura proceeds to walk away from the doorway. James follows.

INT. MASON'S GRILL RESTAURANT - SAME NIGHT

James, Laura and Sam are sitting on stools at a high top table. It's a Bar/Grill atmosphere. They have beers in front of them.

SAM

(To Laura)

The damn wall thing again, huh? (To James) Hey, remember when we were at that lake house with our cousins? (back to Laura) Have you heard this one?

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

No.

SAM

So I was rooming with a 10 or 11 year old James here at this lake house, right? We were out on the lake when our aunt and uncle got in this huge fight. There we were with three of our younger cousins, and all we wanted to do was get in an intertube and be dragged behind the boat.

Sam gets into the story, imitating the motions.

SAM (CONT'D)

So she starts hitting him over the head with whatever she could get her hands on - life vests, fishing poles - and my uncle Frank: he jumps ship!

LAURA

Oh my god!

JAMES

He deserved it.

SAM

What happened was: while we were having a day out there, my uncle calls her by the wrong name. She had been suspecting something for a while from this other woman, and it just so happens that the middle of this lake is where the truth came out.

JAMES

By the time she stopped sobbing on the boat, she looks up at all of the kids staring at her.

SAM

I got it Jimmy: I was the oldest one there, around 15 or 16 at the time.

LAURA

Your uncle never came back?

(CONTINUED)

SAM

No, he was gone! Floating out in the middle of Canyon Lake. So no one knew how to drive the boat. So I decided to step up and give it a shot. Seemed easy. I was looking forward to it even. So I sit in the pilot's seat. (beat) Turns out that asshole took the keys with him!

JAMES

We eventually flagged down another boat.

SAM

Not before getting sun burned to hell.

JAMES

Oh yeah, that sucked.

SAM

So we get back later that night. We're in our rooms and I'm hanging out covered in aloe vera reading some comic book, and Jimmy's standing on the dresser putting his ear to the ceiling.

LAURA

Whaaat? No way.

SAM

Yeah. Just be glad you don't have upstairs neighbors. So I asked him at the time why it was such a big deal. He tells me he had no idea Aunt Janice had hearing like a bat!

LAURA

You've got issues.

SAM

They can't be that bad, you're wearing his ring!

LAURA

I have weird tastes, what can I say.

JAMES

Okay, go on, go on. You two have your issues too you know.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

Whaaat? We all know my demons, but
what's wrong with your fiance?

JAMES

Get ready for this.

Sam and Laura lean in ever so slightly.

JAMES (CONT'D)

She's too nice.

LAURA

Really? That's it?

SAM

You know, Jimmy, you're right -
That's the only reason you get away
with not setting the wedding date.

LAURA

Maybe I'll get mean and force you
down the aisle sooner.

SAM

So back to the wall thing: Results?

LAURA

He didn't hear a thing. And this
new neighbor is a guy who's a
performer, like James. I don't
understand how it matters if *he*
hears you.

SAM

It's usually worse.

JAMES

His judgments are educated.

SAM

How educated?

JAMES

He knows what he's doing on stage.
We remember each other from the
open mic nights. He makes it look
so... effortless, you know? He
always seems to charm the crowd
like nothing you've ever seen
before.

(CONTINUED)

SAM
You're in love with this guy?
What's his name?

James dismisses Sam's comment.

LAURA
Curt.

SAM
You used to do that too, bro.

JAMES
But its much more impressive when
any child plays like I did. You
gotta do more to win them as an
adult.

SAM
You could start by getting on
stage.

LAURA
Easy, Sam.

JAMES
No, he's right. I need to push
myself.

LAURA
You've been trying for years. I
don't think its getting any better.
I've been looking up social anxiety
therapists...

JAMES
No, not therapy.

SAM
Sounds like a winner to me.

JAMES
Really? Therapy?

SAM
I'm still seeing a therapist.

JAMES
I don't want my mind probed and I
certainly don't want to pay someone
to do it. How do you pay for it?

(CONTINUED)

SAM
Group discount.

Sam holds up his coin.

LAURA
You've got that money leftover from
your father...

JAMES
That's for us. That'll cover our
needs for when you're done with
your residency and we get a place
of our own. I can't waste it on a
process that won't even help me.
(to Sam) No offense.

SAM
None taken. But, it *really* does
help. Laura and I know everything
about you and we can't seem to help
you. Maybe someone else can.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NEXT DAY

James rides throughout the neighborhood, as he does,
delivering papers. He approaches an intersection and waits
to cross. A PROMOTER hands him a flyer to promote a show by
the band "SHYLIGHT SURVIVORS". He briefly looks down at the
flyer, then notices the wall nearby is covered with the same
flyers. Next to the grouping are other ads.

The BRIGHT LIGHTS are COMING! THE END IS NEAR!

WANTED: CRIMINAL BY THE NAME OF RED X.

"YOU'RE NOT CRAZY".

Then some smaller text below it. It reads, "and I'm going to
prove it. Do your friends think you need therapy? Free
sessions for a limited time. This is the only flyer I put up
in town, so its simply fate that you have found it. Fate
speaks! You listen. Tear off a number before it's too late.
Then, call that number, before it's REALLY too late." He
removes his backpack and puts the band's flyer in it. This
allow time for audience to read. The bottom of the sheet is
covered by one of the band's flyers. James lifts it to see
that all the numbers are still there. He rips one off.

JAMES
A flyer for therapy, can you
believe it?

(CONTINUED)

PROMOTER
Amazing what you find when you're
really looking for it.

James smiles and nods as the light changes, then rides on through the crosswalk.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - SAME DAY

James turns off the busier roads and into a neighborhood. As it gets more quiet, he eventually stops the bike. He removes his backpack and pulls out his cellphone. He removes the flyer number from his pocket. He calls the number.

Ring.

Ring.

ROB (O.S)
Hello?

The man's voice is scruffy and deep.

JAMES
Hi, I found your flyer on the
corner of 4th and Laurel and I was
interested in your services.

ROB (O.S)
Flyer? What flyer?

JAMES
Therapy flyer.

ROB (O.S)
Ah damn. That's an old flyer.

JAMES
You aren't a therapist anymore?

ROB (O.S)
I am, but that one's... out of
date.

JAMES
How so?

ROB (O.S)
You know what, that's not
important. What's your name?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

James.

ROB (O.S)

Hi James, I'm Rob. Why do you come by and we'll talk.

JAMES

The flyer said 'free'. Is it still free?

ROB (O.S)

I don't know just yet, James.

JAMES

I can't do it unless its free.

ROB (O.S)

You got problems you pay to fix?

JAMES

Of course I'd pay if I knew there was any chance you could fix them.
(beat) I'm sorry, that came out wrong.

ROB (O.S)

I'll say. Come by James, before 4pm. Address is twenty one, fourteen, Court Street.

EXT. SAM'S RENTAL HOME - SAME DAY

James rides onto Sam's lawn once again and parks his bike. He hops up the stairs, knocks on the door. Sam opens it. James rushes past him, planting that last newspaper in his chest again.

INT. SAM'S RENTAL TRAILER - SAME DAY

James walks into the trailer, and turns around to Sam. Sam tosses the newspaper into the trash, then picks up his coffee.

JAMES

Sam, I need to borrow your car.

SAM

Sure. What's the occasion?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I thought you said no questions asked.

SAM

Yeah, you're right, I did. Color me curious.

JAMES

I just want to move a couch.

SAM

You can't fit a couch in that car.

JAMES

It's a futon. A futon cushion without the couch part - look, can I borrow it?

SAM

You're not really moving a futon mattress, are you?

JAMES

No.

SAM

Driver's license up to date?

JAMES

Yeah.

SAM

Driving far?

JAMES

Across the river.

SAM

Is Laura going with you?

JAMES

No, it's just me.

SAM

Well, where's she going to be?

JAMES

You know, for a no questions asked conversation, this sounds like a parole hearing.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

I know parole hearings. They just tell you what they want out of you and you answer yes or no.

JAMES

Then here's one yes or no question. Can I have the keys, please?

SAM

Yeah, here.

James grips the keys in front of him.

JAMES

Thank you, Sam. Walking to work, right?

SAM

Yeah.

JAMES

You have a meeting tonight?

SAM

Yeah.

JAMES

Okay, I'll be back before then. Thanks Sam!

James speeds out of the door.

EXT. THE DOORWAY OF ROB VINCENT. - SAME DAY

James arrives in his brother's car at a generic home. He approaches the door.

Knock, knock, knock.

Barking is heard from inside. James hears Rob inside.

ROB

Come on, Buddy, that ain't the mailman. Take it easy.

Rob Vincent, a man in his 30s, opens the door. He has a unique look about him. He is wearing glasses, a suit jacket over a graphic t-shirt, plaid pants, and converse sneakers.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
How can I help you?

The dog sniffs James in the doorway.

JAMES
I'm James Chelere. I called you
earlier.

ROB
Of course: James Chelere. I'm Rob
Vincent.

James shakes Rob's hand. Up once, down once.

ROB (CONT'D)
Come on in.

James enters.

INT. THE HOME OF ROB VINCENT. - SAME DAY

James enters into a common enough home. Other than the piano, large table, and projector, it has all of the normal amenities.

ROB
Have a seat wherever - there's
plenty of seats. Coffee?

JAMES
No thanks.

James heads for the couch and takes a seat.

ROB
I got one of them single cup coffee
makers. Still trying to convince
myself its worth eighty cents a
cup. The irish cream makes it worth
it.

Rob observes James on the couch. Rob grabs his coffee and a chair stool from the bar-high table, drags it over to the couch. James returns a quizzical look. Rob sits with the chair backwards.

ROB (CONT'D)
We normally sit at the table, but
this is fine.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Should I move?

ROB
Nah, its just a space thing. I
wanna give myself some running room
in case things get nasty when
you're spilling your guts.

JAMES
You don't have an office for your
work?

ROB
You're in it.

JAMES
Aah.

A moment passes. Rob sips his coffee. James is visibly nervous.

JAMES (CONT'D)
So what do I talk about?

ROB
Whatever you want. To be honest,
I'm just sizing you up right now.
Its been a few months since I've
done pro-bono work.

JAMES
So it *is* free?

ROB
Woah, I didn't say that. I just
haven't done it for free *lately*.

JAMES
The moment this starts costing me
anything, you let me know.

ROB
Roger that.

Another moment.

ROB (CONT'D)
You nervous?

JAMES
Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Why the hell are you nervous?

JAMES
I've never been to therapy before.

ROB
I ain't gonna bite. Hell, I should be the nervous one. You might be a damn psychopath.

JAMES
Wow.

ROB
I nailed it, didn't I?

JAMES
No, your demeanor. Its not what I expected.

ROB
You've never been to therapy before, so what were your expectations? All therapists act like me, more or less. So who told you ya needed a shrink?

JAMES
Everyone.

ROB
Ah, so you are a psychopath.

JAMES
No, it's not anything like that. I have a problem with being on stage.

ROB
Stage fright? (Laughs) Here's what you do. Don't go on stage.

JAMES
I've been avoiding it.

ROB
Then what's the problem?

JAMES
Everyone thinks I should be on stage.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Who's everyone?

JAMES
Friends. Family. Fiance.

ROB
Those damn "F" words. People in my
field hear those all damn day.

JAMES
I sign up for open mic nights, but
I always feed myself some excuse to
take off before my name is called.

ROB
Open mic? You're a funny man -
stand up comic?

JAMES
Musician.

ROB
Ah. I used to dabble in piano, but
now it may as well be a boat
anchor.

Rob motions to the piano in the room.

ROB (CONT'D)
You play piano?

JAMES
Yeah.

ROB
Then play me a song, mr. piano man.

JAMES
No.

ROB
No?

JAMES
Yeah, I don't want to.

ROB
Well why the hell not? You ain't on
a stage right now. I ain't got a
audience hiding in the back.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I can't perform in front of most people.

ROB

Aah. Now we're getting to the good stuff.

JAMES

Close family and Laura, my fiance - I can play in front of them. I know, its weird... right?

ROB

I deal in weird everyday. This is very light weird. You've just got a plug in that head of yours that we need to unclog. But before we dive deep into that, my fees are normally one fifty an hour.

JAMES

A hundred and fifty dollars?

ROB

I sure as hell don't mean a dollar fifty, so yeah - a hundred and fifty dollars. (beat) But you found my flyer, and I'm not one to falsely advertise. It's my fault I didn't put an expiration date on it. Did you read the whole thing?

JAMES

Yeah, but I was mostly attracted to the "free therapy" part.

ROB

That's all anyone saw. It's a bunch of bullshit anyway. I had them all over the place. Thought I took them all down.

JAMES

So it is free?

ROB

Yeah, but I'll tell you this: I'm much nicer to the people who pay.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME EVENING

The sun is starting to drop. James comes back with Sam's car. As he gets out of the car, another car pulls up and parks. MIRANDA, skinny and attractive, but strung out looking early twenty something, stands up outside of her car and yells over to James.

MIRANDA

Hey, have you seen Sam?

Sam opens the front door and makes his way to James.

JAMES

(to Miranda)

Who are you?

MIRANDA

I'm Miranda, I'm here to pick him up.

On the way to Miranda's car, Sam give James a brotherly hug.

JAMES

(To Sam)

You don't need a ride - Here's your keys.

James places Sam's keys in Sam's hand.

SAM

(Looking at Miranda, talking to James)

Thanks bro, but I think I'm gonna carpool today.

Sam has a "new love" smile on his face.

JAMES

To your meeting? With her?

SAM

Yeah, you're always telling me to be green and save gas.

JAMES

No, I don't want to pay for gas.

SAM

Sure, sure. Hey, thanks for the keys. Let me know if you need them again.

Sam takes off for Miranda's car.

(CONTINUED)

SAM (CONT'D)
(yelling to James)
Take care, bro!

James stands in Sam's front yard. He didn't like her look.
He watches them drive away.

EXT. APARTMENT MAILBOXES - DAY

After a full morning's work, James rides up on his bike to the apartment mailboxes. He opens his mailbox and grabs his mail.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME DAY

James is holding his bank statement over a torn open letter. \$1943.67 left in his account. James sighs. He looks to his guitar, like it has all the answers.

INT. DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James approaches the counter where Barry is talking to REGULAR CUSTOMER.

JAMES
Hey Barry, where's the open mic setup?

BARRY
Only on Tuesdays now. Not enough interest on a Friday night.

JAMES
Damn it.

BARRY
Hah - You were gonna play this time?

JAMES
Yeah, Barry, I was gonna play. There's not even anything going on in here right now.

BARRY
Less stress on me, buddy. If you want to play for tips on the sidewalk out front, be my guest.

Barry returns to talking to the REGULAR CUSTOMER. James sighs again, contemplating if he can go through with it.

EXT. DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James walks outside with a chair taken from inside the restaurant. He puts it down a few feet from the door, sits, opens his guitar case, puts the guitar on his knee, leaves the case open for tips. He sits looking down at his guitar for a long while. His left hand makes the motions, but his right hand holds the strings, not allowing sound to escape.

A PASSER-BY walks by, stops in front of James and takes a few moments to dig in his own pockets. He finds two crumpled up singles and tosses them into the case. He stands, waiting to get something for his payment.

JAMES

Thank you.

PASSER-BY

You' Welcome.

Passer-By waits. He lights a cigarette and/or checks his phone while he waits.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You gonna play?

JAMES

I'm warming up.

PASSER-BY

All right.

The passer-by continues to smoke and/or check his phone while James continues making motions but no sounds.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You serious?

JAMES

About what?

PASSER-BY

You ain't tunin' or nothin'. You gonna play sometime tonight?

JAMES

I am.

The frustrated passer-by snatches his money back out of the case.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Sir, please.

PASSER-BY

I'ma get me some coffee inside. Be warmed up when I come out here.

The passer-by goes inside. James closes his eyes, trying to psyche himself up for the moment. Deep breath. Deep breath. The door to the Daily Grind opens back up. The passer-by approaches James. A man, GABE LARSON (30s), well-dressed and all around cool guy, exits the Grind. He spots the event and watches from a distance with his coffee in hand. The passer-by waits for a moment, then speaks up.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You're giving the other street performers like myself a bad name. Man, close the case and get yourself some cardboard and a Sharpie.

Gabe approaches after the passer-by leaves.

GABE

I couldn't talk til I was in high school.

James has an attitude as he goes on the defensive.

JAMES

I can talk fine.

GABE

But that voice doesn't mean as much to you as *that voice*, does it?

Gabe points James's face, then at the guitar. James's attitude changes as this guy might have good advice.

GABE

When I finally spoke up, I had a lot to say. It took me places. Now I don't know if you're any good - or if you can play at all. But when its your time to speak, or in your case *play*, you'll know it.

Gabe reaches into a money clip.

GABE

Don't push yourself. Have a good night.

Gabe drops a twenty dollar bill in the guitar case, then walks away. James's upset at himself. He kicks the case shut.

EXT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - DAY

James comes back home from a day of work. Curt is playing his guitar outside the apartment. James tries to get past him without sparking conversation, so he darts for his own door.

CURT
Hey, James, right?

Busted. James stops and turn to Curt.

JAMES
Yeah.

CURT
Let me know if I'm playing too loud. You just get a different sound when ya play outside.

Curt admires the sky.

CURT (CONT'D)
And it's a perfect night for it.

JAMES
Nope. Play on, no problem.

CURT
Cool man - hey, look - if you aren't doing anything later, I've got some friends coming by - Call it a housewarming. You're welcome to come by.

JAMES
I've got Laura - that girl you met - she's coming by...

CURT
She can come to! There's a few other people from around the complex that'll be here. You probably know 'em better than I do.

JAMES
Us talking right now is the most I've talked to any of my neighbors.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

Well, I think it's time for a change then.

JAMES

I'll mention it to Laura. You know, we'll see.

CURT

Okay man, stay cool.

JAMES

I'll do my best.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James and Laura sit on the couch, watching television.

JAMES

You're going to be proud of me.

LAURA

Shh, Bachelor. (beat) Okay, commercial, what's up?

JAMES

The other day, I talked to a therapist.

Laura is excited.

LAURA

That's incredible! Why didn't you say anything before?

JAMES

I wasn't sure if it was for me. I've had a few days to think about it. It was just a first "get to know you" visit, but he wasn't all about money or anything, so I think this can work. I'll be going back once a week.

LAURA

Yes - it will work. I'm proud of you. This is a *huge* step. What's his name?

JAMES

Rob. Rob Vincent. I have to borrow Sam's car to get to his place across the river.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
His place? His house?

JAMES
Yeah.

LAURA
That's strange. He doesn't have an office?

JAMES
No, just the house.

LAURA
How'd you find this guy?

JAMES
Isn't it enough that I found him and I'm going to a complete stranger to talk about things that are nobody's business and affect no one but myself...

James gets loud, then catches himself.

JAMES
I'm sorry, but can you just let this be *my thing*? I just wanted you to be aware of it. Besides, you've got a lot going on with your residency and I just want to make sure this works out for me before I make a bigger deal about it.

LAURA
Okay. If you need a ride or anything like that, I'm here for you, and it'll still be your thing.

JAMES
I appreciate it.

LAURA
Speaking of my residency - it is *my thing*, but can I still talk about it?

JAMES
Don't be silly. Of course.

LAURA
Tomorrow marks one month before I leave that place so I can go get a real job.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

That's great!

LAURA

I've been looking around at these local hospitals. Even though they just built two new ones, it seems like I've missed the wave by just a few months.

JAMES

What about the hospital you're at now?

LAURA

They can't afford me.

James is satisfied by this answer. He smiles and ponders.

JAMES

I've always wanted to say that and mean it.

LAURA

You're still open to moving, aren't you?

JAMES

Yeah, I'm open to that.

LAURA

What about Sam? And your mother? The rest of your family?

JAMES

You want them all to move too?

LAURA

(laughs)

No, I mean are you okay with being away from them?

JAMES

We live in the age of Skype. That, and the occasional trip home, will suffice. Besides Sam, I rarely see my family now. Nothing will change if we're across the country.

LAURA

I'm glad you said *across the country*... because I've been looking into hospitals on the west

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (cont'd)
coast. I think it'll be good for
your music to be out there.

JAMES
This isn't about my music. I can
make music anywhere. You lead the
way and I will follow.

LAURA
Okay.

Laura turns to the windows as a group walks by.

LAURA
Looks like your neighbor is having
his first party.

JAMES
He's having a housewarming thing.

LAURA
You talked to him?

JAMES
Yeah, he invited both of us -

LAURA
- We should go!

James refocuses on the television.

JAMES
(making up something quick)
I don't know, this show on TV seems
really good.

LAURA
Show's over. Put on your shoes.
Let's go be social.

Laura gets up and heads to the bathroom to prepare. James
sits reluctant to prepare.

INT. CURT'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

There are about ten people here, including Curt. Curt's
crowd = hipsters. They are all sitting around Curt while he
tells stories.

Music is coming lightly from the stereo. Something like
Arcade Fire - Wake Up, but indie. Curt recalls this tale
like any heart touching moment.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

(to crowd)

... But she couldn't get a hold of anyone. The cashier was just completely unsympathetic - his face said "someone get this old lady out of my store", so I spoke up and asked her if she needed a ride home. And the poor thing could barely hear me, so she was already confused. She said "Are you a taxi service?" And I said "No ma'am, but I'd love to help and give you a ride home. So I gave her a ride home, which happened to be in this complex, and that's how I found the place.

Laura and James enter into the apartment.

CURT (CONT'D)

It's amazing what you can discover just by being that helping hand when someone needs it. It only takes thirty minutes, you might end up finding a new place, *and* you just feel great for doing it.

The crowd agrees. The women "awww", and the men nod in approval.

LAURA

Hey Curt, thanks for the invite!

CURT

Laura! James! Welcome! Everyone, this is Laura and James, my neighbors to the right - Laura and James, this is everyone!

EVERYONE

[Hello's and Hi's]

James and Laura return casual hellos.

CURT

We were just talking about how I found this place. How'd you find yourself here, James?

JAMES

Classifieds.

(CONTINUED)

Long beat as Curt's friends aren't as impressed by this story.

CURT
Who needs refills?

Curt gets up, collecting empty bottles, then heads to the kitchen. While doing so, James turns to Laura.

JAMES
(To Laura)
These people smell funny.

LAURA
Be nice.

JAMES
I'm just gonna go wait at home.

LAURA
(harsh whisper)
Don't leave here!

The rest of the crowd return to each other's company, and Laura joins in one.

LAURA
Oh I love your scarf, did you make
that? (continue dribble)

James is left standing; The group now preoccupied.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

James walks outside of Curt's place. He has a "red solo cup" in hand. White Christmas lights shine on the facade, a few chairs and Curt's guitar. James looks at it, then plucks down the strings. He immediately looks around to see if anyone heard him. He closes the door to the apartment. He sits down, puts his cup down, grabs the guitar and begins to play. He hums along with what he's playing, trying to fit words as well.

JAMES
...Close the case, get some
cardboard and a Sharpie...

Curt appears behind James in the window - which is open. He overhears James's genius. A HIPSTER VISITOR walks into the kitchen.

(CONTINUED)

HIPSTER VISITOR

Hey Curt, where do you keep the
good beers?

James's nerves take over as he grips the neck to mute the
sound.

CURT

Bottom shelf.

Curt disappears from the kitchen window. Curt walks outside
and takes a seat next to James.

CURT

You can't stop playing, that was
beautiful!

JAMES

I'm sorry, I should have asked if I
could use your guitar.

James attempts to put the guitar back, but Curt puts his
hand in front of it, forcing it to stay in James's lap.

CURT

No sir, its no problem. What was it
you were playing?

JAMES

I don't know. It was nothing - just
playing around.

CURT

That was an original, wasn't it?
Please, play it again.

JAMES

I can't... You know, my fingers
just started hurting, cause it's
been a while since I've played.
Maybe you should take over now.

Curt can see James getting more and more nervous. He decides
to not push for it anymore.

CURT

Okay, I'll play a bit. But you have
to stay and listen. Maybe give me
some pointers.

JAMES

I have no problem with that.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

Cause I have to warn you - I'm more of a G-C-D-chord kind of player.

JAMES

Whatever works. That covers about half the songs out there.

Curt begins to play some simple stuff.

JAMES

Your rhythm and strumming is key. You're playing just fine.

CURT

I appreciate that. I could always use some lessons from a good teacher.

JAMES

Oh no, I'm no teacher.

CURT

Anyone can teach those willing to learn - and I'm certainly willing to learn after what I heard you play.

JAMES

What do you like to do when you're not here entertaining your friends and neighbors?

CURT

I'm an street artist and musician.

JAMES

Ah, of course you are. Where do you paint?

CURT

I keep around the levee. Sometimes I take it over to the university.

James takes a drink.

CURT (CONT'D)

I love it, but when it comes to getting paid, Baton Rouge is tough on artists. Maybe its like that everywhere. So I'm trying to get more into music - Just singing though. Share time between that and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CURT (CONT'D) (cont'd)
the art. I just jumped on board
with a cover band called *Red Light*.
Heard of 'em?

JAMES
Nope.

CURT
Typical covers for now, nothing
special. You in a band?

JAMES
I used to play with my brother. Not
really a band per say. More like
just goofing around.

Curt nods in agreement.

JAMES (CONT'D)
He was really good about finding my
sound. I wouldn't have to tell him
much. He just knew how to do it, as
if he wrote the songs with me. But,
he sold his drums a few years back,
so we don't do that anymore.

CURT
You always write and play your own
stuff?

JAMES
Yeah. I don't think there is an
audience for the kind of stuff I
write.

CURT
Listen, I'll be your audience
anytime. If its more of what I
heard you playing - *anytime*, my
friend. What genre does it fit
under?

JAMES
Autobiographical. Like a journal.
Unfortunately, journals aren't
meant to be shared. Your style is
more like, say, a young adult
novel, which is great - cause its
what people want.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

Come on now, all music is meant to be shared. It's like the tree falling in the forest and no one's there to hear it. How is anyone going to hear the greatest song ever to be conceived if its not shared?

JAMES

I'm not writing the greatest songs.

CURT

I'm not convinced. I especially get curious when I've tasted what people are serving and they hide the rest of the batch. I've gotta hear more from you, or, you can show me the batch.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

Curt enters slowly, while looking around speechless. He has same wonder in his eyes as the children entering Willie Wonka's factory.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Laura put it all together. She thought it would make the place more "me".

CURT

This place is wild.

JAMES

It's just a few of the songs. Mostly Laura's favorites.

CURT

Wow. (beat) Sorry, I can't get over this. You are one talented motherfucker.

JAMES

Mmm... Thanks.

CURT

When did you start writing music?

JAMES

When I was a kid. First grade.

(CONTINUED)

CURT
You know when I wrote my first
song?

JAMES
When?

CURT
I'll let you know when it happens.

JAMES
Aah.

CURT
Damn, man, I envy you. This is
incredible.

JAMES
Envy me? No, this is just how I
vent. I wouldn't even qualify some
of these as songs.

CURT
With this volume, you could have a
load of duds and you'll still come
out with some hits. What do you
write about?

JAMES
All of my songs come from a place
in my life. I can read these lyrics
or hear the notes and remember
things... like an audible memory.

James begins to point at the wall, pointing out specifics.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You can see my progression as I
began to better understand music.
At first, I used lines to represent
pitches til I learned about using
the staff and notes. (long beat)
This wall represents years of
neglecting grade school.

CURT
Time well spent.

JAMES
Should we head back?

(CONTINUED)

CURT
People need to hear you, James.

JAMES
Maybe.

CURT
Not maybe. This is a must. How can I convince you that this is important? So few musicians possess a unique voice. All my life I've only done covers - coming up with my own ideas of what those songs were about.

JAMES
You play them well, though.

CURT
I appreciate that... but we're not exactly reinventing the wheel. Let me know if I'm over the line, but I want to play stuff like this.

Curt motions to the walls.

JAMES
You want to play my music?

CURT
Yes, I want to cover it though, because you're an artist in your own right, playing your own music. I'm just tired of playing all of the popular stuff. I'm waiting for the day someone approaches me to ask about the song I just played. It'd be something if I could tell them its one of yours.

JAMES
That's kind of weird, isn't it?

CURT
I never thought of playing another local's music til this moment. I guess it is kind of weird, but I think that's why I like it.

JAMES
Yeah. (long beat) I think like it too.

(CONTINUED)

James quickly scans the wall and pulls one of the pages off of the bottom.

CURT
Aw, not the wall!

JAMES
Don't worry, all of these are
copies. Here, start with this one.
It's called "RISE".

CURT
I appreciate it man.

JAMES
I always said if I had a band, this
would be one I'd play. All the
notes and chords are there. Just
promise me you'll do something
crazy with it.

CURT
We will man. We'll have some fun
with it.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

Curt and James exit James's apartment. Laura is sitting
outside.

LAURA
What were you two up to?

CURT
He was giving me the tour. It's
really something in there.

LAURA
Can you believe it?

Laura sees the paper in Curt's hand.

LAURA
(surprised/disbelief)
He let you take a souvenir?

JAMES
I gave Curt a song to try out with
his band.

Curt holds it up proudly - like a second grader proud of his
first A+.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

Rise... I think I heard him play
that one recently.

CURT

Well I am jealous of you. I haven't
gotten him to play, but I overheard
our boy earlier. Is that a thing
though? I mean, I don't want to get
personal or anything...

JAMES

Its not that bad.

LAURA

It's bad.

JAMES

(to Laura)

It's not anything to get excited
about.

LAURA

Its like spotting Bigfoot. But when
you hear it, its just... exactly
what you want to hear, you know?

James groans.

CURT

You're his biggest fan, huh?

LAURA

Yeah - but seriously, these songs.
He needs to do something with them.

CURT

I agree. I only heard him for a
moment, but after hearing that and
seeing his art, I'm his second
biggest fan.

JAMES

Okay, I appreciate it, but I'm not
a fan of all of the bravado, so I'm
gonna go home now.

LAURA

Okay, I'll stop.

JAMES

Still, its late. We should go.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

You have not seen the last of me,
my friend. We still have a lot to
talk about.

JAMES

I can't wait.

James shakes Curt's hand. Up once, down once. Laura raises
her glass to Curt.

LAURA

Thanks for having us over.

James give a final goodbye wave. Laura and James depart.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

Laura is preparing to sleep. James is tucking her in.

LAURA

First the therapist, now you're
letting people play your music...

JAMES

It's a brand new me.

LAURA

Yeah, it is. I'm surprised you're
not freaking out.

JAMES

No one's ever asked me to play my
songs. It's sort of flattering.

LAURA

Like your own little cover band.

JAMES

Yeah, I guess it is.

LAURA

As long as you're okay with it,
I'll be okay with it.

James get up from the bed and walks to the doorway.

JAMES

That's because you're drunk.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

Yeah. Ask me tomorrow and we'll see
if I still feel this way.

JAMES

Good night. I'll make sure we have
plenty of ibuprofen and sports
drinks.

James turns out the lights and returns to his living room.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James is holding the paper banner where he removed the song.
He gently rubs his finger along the torn edge, then lets out
a sigh.

INT. ROB'S HOME - DAY

James is laying on the couch in the therapist routine. Rob
pours himself a cocktail at the nearby bar, then returns to
the stool placed in front of the couch.

ROB

So you just froze. Nobody else was
around?

JAMES

I don't think so.

ROB

Well, what the hell, man? Why do
you put yourself in these
positions? Did you really think
you'd succeed playing on the
street? Or that guy's apartment?

JAMES

No, I...

ROB

Ya' ain't there yet! Stop doing
that to yourself!

JAMES

Okay! Fuck.

ROB

Baby steps, ever heard of 'em? From
now on, you only play in public
when I'm around, got it?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Yeah.

ROB

Ruining my whole damn method. Now this Curt character - your neighbor, well-liked... what's the rest of his story?

JAMES

I see him around the open mic nights. He's in a cover band and he's a street artist.

ROB

Shit, you hang around with a lot of *labor of love* types. Is he any good?

JAMES

Good enough to be successful at it.

ROB

I used to room with three guys in college - all eager to make it. Music undergrads, every single one of 'em.

JAMES

What were you?

ROB

Psychology, dummy. Now listen to the damn story. One on one, I'd talk to each of them. Eventually I'd get to see how serious each of them were. Two of them believed they were better than the rest. The other guy just loved music to the core. He didn't care about fighting to get to the top. He just played to play. So those two with the egos eventually gave up. They got tired of believing that everyone owed them something. The guy who did it for the love - you know what his name is?

JAMES

What?

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Bruce Springsteen.

JAMES
Get the fuck outta here.

Rob laughs loudly.

ROB
You shoulda seen your eyes buggin' out! Fuck no, I didn't room with the boss, but that guy did end up making a living producing music. So don't worry about those guys who think they're hot shit, cause they'll burn out.

JAMES
I don't know if Curt is the boastful type though.

ROB
Let me ask you: What do you do *for a living*?

JAMES
I deliver papers.

ROB
Why didn't say you were a musician?

JAMES
Because I don't do that *for a living*.

ROB
If he makes a living out being a street artist and a musician, then more power to him. But if he tells you that stuff just to impress you, then he is the type.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Laura and James walk together down a downtown Baton Rouge street.

LAURA
It's so rare that we go out like this.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

You're so busy all the time.

LAURA

I want to walk around all over the place after we move. Somewhere like San Francisco or Seattle. Somewhere by the ocean.

JAMES

Ocean's good.

LAURA

Somewhere with different levels of elevation.

James points ahead at the levee.

JAMES

We have levees. That's fifty feet of different elevation.

LAURA

You want to stay here?

JAMES

I go where you go.

LAURA

Aww...

JAMES

Curt suppose to be painting around here somewhere.

Laura points.

LAURA

There.

EXT. LEVEE PARK - SAME NIGHT

Curt is sweating through his tank top as he speed paints onto a large canvas using various spray paints and acrylics. A few park gawkers stand by watching him make aggressive attacks onto the canvas. Laura and James approach. James notices the tip hat. There's money inside. There are a few other canvas' set up around Curt. Curt notices them first after he finishes the current piece.

(CONTINUED)

CURT
James and Laura! What brings you
guys out here?

LAURA
We were in the neighborhood. These
are beautiful.

CURT
Thank you, thank you.

A GAWKER approaches Curt. Laura walks away to look at the
paintings.

GAWKER
Excuse me. How much for the one on
the left there?

CURT
You can take that home with you for
only sixty dollars, my friend.

GAWKER
Hmm, let me think about that.

The gawker walks away, toward the painting.

JAMES
He's not going to buy it.

CURT
Why do you say that?

JAMES
I used to work retail. Once they
ask the price and "*think about it*",
they're gone.

From the painting, the gawker speaks up.

GAWKER
I'll take it!

CURT
You won't be disappointed! Would
you like that wrapped?

GAWKER
No, thanks.

CURT
Just drop the money in the hat.

(CONTINUED)

The gawker takes the painting then drops three twenty dollar bills in the tip hat.

CURT (CONT'D)
Have a good night, sir!

JAMES
You're so trusting.

CURT
You need to learn to trust people.

JAMES
So this is how you make a living,
huh? Not too bad.

CURT
Its good money. I wish it was
enough to live off of, but I still
gotta work.

JAMES
You work?

CURT
Of course I work. If I ever make
enough from just playing music or
selling art, then that'll be the
moment when I stop working and just
enjoy life. Til that day, I gotta
keep working.

JAMES
I was just confused because when we
first met I asked you what you did.

CURT
I said musician and street artist,
didn't I? Both are the things I
prefer to do.

JAMES
Then what do you do *for a living*?

CURT
Graphic design.

JAMES
So when someone asks you what you
do, you tell them that?

(CONTINUED)

CURT

What I do and what I do for a living are two different things. Besides, everyone works.

JAMES

He doesn't.

James points at a BUM lying on a bench. They both look at the bum.

CURT

Not in the traditional sense, but his job is to beg and borrow. He keeps us all on track. Let's us know what happens if we decide by lazy and stop equaling our potential. I'd say he's got a pretty important job.

James continues to look at the bum as Curt breaks away from the conversation. Curt picks up a twenty out of the hat on his way to the bum. He kneels down to the bum and James sees them talking. Curt hands him the twenty mid-conversation. James just watches.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

Sam is sitting in a robe in a chair. James sits nearby on the couch. TV's on.

JAMES

(to Sam)

Do you think I'm lazy?

SAM

(to TV)

Nah, you stay busy enough. Shrink says you're lazy?

JAMES

No. (beat) How did you know I was seeing a therapist?

SAM

You borrow my car the same day every week. (long beat) And Laura told me.

JAMES

Maybe lazy isn't the right word. Stubborn?

(CONTINUED)

SAM
Where's all of this coming from?

JAMES
I'm a thirty year old paper boy.

SAM
Paper man.

JAMES
I should have an adult job. You're
a mechanic, Laura is in medicine...

SAM
Most people aren't motivated by
title or money.

JAMES
I need to start being motivated.

SAM
You need money?

James hesitates.

JAMES
No. And you don't have any.

SAM
Did you touch your accident money?

JAMES
A little bit.

Sam looks away from the TV at James.

SAM
That was *fifteen grand*. Don't be
like me and blow it. You're better
than that.

JAMES
Why?

SAM
Cause you're not going to blow it
all on drugs and women.

JAMES
Not drugs, but Laura's ring set me
back a bit.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

If you need to earn more money, you need sell some of that talent.

JAMES

I've been thinking about that. I have a song out on loan right now.

SAM

What the hell does that mean?

JAMES

I'm letting my neighbor play it with his band.

SAM

That's bullshit. Let em' write his own stuff.

JAMES

Maybe I'm not ready to sell it yet.

SAM

Come on Jimmy. I can't get behind that. There shouldn't be an in between. Sell it or keep it.

JAMES

I like it this way. At least til I perform my own stuff, which I absolutely intend on doing.

SAM

It's up to you. I say play your own music - cause what makes him better than you? That's all I'm saying.

A woman walks in from the back room. MIRANDA is wearing clothes, whose wrinkles tell a story that she wore them yesterday.

SAM

Hey! Miranda, you remember James, right? James; Miranda.

She is nice enough, but kind of spacey.

MIRANDA

Hey. Listen, Sam, I gotta jet to work. I had fun last night, let's do this again.

(CONTINUED)

SAM
I had fun too.

James looks like he's never seen this Sam before. Sam walks her to the door. A kiss, she leaves. Sam watches her leave through a window.

JAMES
That girl was in your house.

SAM
I know.

JAMES
Why was that girl in your house?

Sam turns around to James.

SAM
I can have women, or girls, at my house, Jimmy.

JAMES
Your words were: I need to ward off women to focus on sobriety.

SAM
I know what I said, but hell...
I've been sober for nearly 10 months - I can be with a woman if I want to.

JAMES
That's fine. It was your rule anyway. (beat) Where'd you meet her? At work?

Sam begins cleaning up after breakfast.

SAM
I met her at the meetings.

JAMES
Your anonymous meetings?

SAM
Yeah.

JAMES
Has she been sober as long as you have?

(CONTINUED)

SAM

No. She's fresh. Like a month or two.

JAMES

Wow. A month. Or two.

SAM

Two months is something, okay?

JAMES

It is, it is.

SAM

I was there before. Two months is an accomplishment. A big accomplishment.

JAMES

I take it she has sturdy moral support at home?

Sam stops cleaning and looks at James as if you say, "Come on."

JAMES

The only reason I ask is because I was here day one. Month one. Month two. And you're right, it is a big accomplishment to get to that point, but it takes a lot more than sitting alone just marking off days on a calendar to get to the point you're at now.

SAM

She's got me, okay? She's got me.

JAMES

You're right. You know what you're doing. (beat) You *do* know what you're doing...

SAM

Yeah, Jimmy, I know. I know what I'm doing.

JAMES

Cause it's the last thing any of us want.

(CONTINUED)

SAM
I know what I'm doing.

INT. THE HOME OF ROB VINCENT. - DAY

Rob opens the door. James is there with a bag and his guitar.

ROB
Come on in. Put all that stuff down on the couch. You got everything, right?

JAMES
Yeah. Why did you ask me to bring all of this?

James puts everything down on the couch.

ROB
Therapy experiment. Let me see.

He opens up the guitar case, then closes it. Rob looks in the bag.

ROB (CONT'D)
I don't know what any of this shit is in here. Where's the keyboard?

JAMES
In the car. All of that in bag powers it. Plus my melodica is in there and a few other things.

ROB
Great, so your apartment is void of everything musical...

JAMES
I thought you just wanted me to play here.

ROB
Hey! That'd be something if you actually did! But now, I'm not giving you the choice. All of this stays here, plus the keyboard. You wanna play, you play here. Or you borrow it from your neighbor friend. He'll love that.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I'm not leaving any of this here.

ROB

Look James, I ain't stealing it. Take it back if you want, but then you and I are done. Or, you can respect my methods and roll with the punches.

James thinks for a moment, sighs, then nods. Rob gives him a quick light jab on the arms.

ROB (CONT'D)

That's right. Sit down.

James sits at the table. Rob sits next to him.

ROB (CONT'D)

Give it a week and you'll be dying to play in my presence. Now that I've got your attention and your shit, let me ask you a question. Who will miss hearing all of that the most?

JAMES

Probably my fiance, Laura.

ROB

Who else?

JAMES

My brother, Sam. My mother. That's about it.

ROB

You, you idiot. You're suppose to say "James will miss it the most!".

JAMES

Oh, right.

ROB

I'm spoon feeding you these moments of self-realization and you're pissin' all over 'em!

JAMES

Damn, sorry.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
So where's Dad on that list?

JAMES
He wasn't a fan.

ROB
Not around?

JAMES
He died when I was nine.

ROB
You don't say.

James begins to get nervous.

JAMES
Car accident.

ROB
Where you in it?

JAMES
Yeah. Let's not talk about it
though.

James's breathing becomes more and more rapid.

ROB
We gotta talk about it.

JAMES
Not right now, please.

James gets up and backs away from the table. Rob gets up and becomes calming.

ROB
Hold on now. Breathe. Easy.

James backs away onto the piano and leans on it for support.

JAMES
I know we gotta talk about it. Not
right now though. Next time, okay?

Rob nods.

EXT. JAMES'S APARTMENT AREA - SAME NIGHT

James comes home to his apartment to find Curt hanging out next door outside with his band mates LIAM, BEN, and RYAN.

CURT
Hey man, let me introduce you to
the band.

JAMES
Okay.

James makes his way over to Curt and the group.

CURT
This is Liam, Ben, and Ryan. This
is James.

JAMES
(awkward)
Hi guys, I like your music. Big
fan.

James is trying to be cute, but they don't get it.

CURT
Ah, Good one. Good one.

LIAM
(surprised)
This is James Chelere? Hey man,
it's an honor to meet you.

James realizes his jokes don't phase the band, because they are in awe of him. It gets weird.

JAMES
Alright. Well, I've been at it all
day. It was nice to meet you all.

They wave and say goodbyes. James walks away, but Curt watches as he does - as if something is on his mind.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James is sitting on his piano bench with his hands in the air pressing invisible keys. He can still hear the notes.

After a short while, there is a knock at the door. He stands up and makes his way to the door and opens it. It's Curt.

(CONTINUED)

CURT
Hey, can I talk to you for a few?

JAMES
Sure, come in.

CURT enters, still admiring the wall art. He turns back to James.

CURT
Where'd your keyboard go?

JAMES
Someone's borrowing it. What's up?

CURT
Man, I needed to tell you: We are loving that song you wrote. It's really great and we're doing a lot with it.

JAMES
Cool. That's good.

CURT
I wanted to run this by you, because it's been unofficial for now. The band name we're considering is "Chelere". It's a cool, different name, and we want to represent you more because we want to shift from pop covers to everything James Chelere. We want songs that are original - something new for the people to hear. We figured if you could provide us with the music, the name of the band is the least we could do for you.

JAMES
Wow, I'm flattered Curt. Feels weird though that I'm not in the band that's named after me.

CURT
I'd love have you as a part of the band, but I hopped on late myself - found those three on Craigslist. Also, I didn't want to assume you'd be up for the stage performance.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I'm trying to the point where I'm playing my songs for people. You know what I'm saying?

CURT

I hear ya. You've got a lot of songs though. I don't want you to do anything you'd feel uncomfortable doing. When your song comes up at the shows, [we always give]...

JAMES

(interrupting)

You've done shows?

CURT

Just a few opening gigs. Those guys out there have friends that are giving us the gigs, it's nothing really. But before we play your song, I make it a point to let people know who wrote these songs. People ask me "Who's James Chelere"? and I always say "Oh, he's my neighbor who wrote that badass song", but now I can tell them you play at the Grind.

JAMES

Only sometimes. You know how it is there.

CURT

Alright, sometimes at the Grind. But we really want to put your name on this band - if that appeals to you - but to do that, it really has to be everything "you".

JAMES

It's definitely cool. I didn't even name my own jam band after me.

CURT

What was it called?

JAMES

Pizza Party.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

CURT
That's not a bad name.

JAMES
I know, right?

CURT
So nine more songs will put at us
ten, which is a good place to be.
Otherwise, I gotta take that name
Pizza Party, cause that'll be the
only kind of gigs we'll get playing
pop covers.

JAMES
Okay.

James breaks away from the conversation and begins to pick off papers from the wall. He goes to his bookshelf and goes through the notebooks. He comes across a newspaper article about his car accident. He puts it aside. He hands the songs to Curt.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Nine songs.

CURT
Chelere thanks you. Come see us on
Tuesday at Spanish Moon, will ya?
Its a late show, after the open mic
at the Grind.

JAMES
Yeah, maybe.

Curt hugs James then pats him on the arm. Curt walks out of the apartment, and with the door still open, turns to his band.

CURT
We're Chelere! Woo!

Off screen, the band celebrates with cheers and clinking beer bottles. Curt laughs and smiles as he points at James. He reaches for the door and closes it.

James picks up the newspaper spread containing the article about the accident. The headline reads "Child survives deadly accident thanks to first responder". A murky black and white photo poorly details the scene of the accident.

INT. ROB'S HOME - DAY

Dialogue starts over the scene before and carries into this scene. James is lying on the couch. The shot is floating over him as he looks past the camera at the ceiling.

JAMES

Days after Christmas, we were coming home from Texas. My dad was driving. My mom in the passenger seat; Sam and I in the back. Sam was sleeping. I had our six month old puppy named "Butch" by my side, also asleep. I had a guitar in my lap - child's size. Gift from the grandfolks. I had been playing since we hit the road. He told me to stop, but I didn't. Mom told him to take it easy. He ignored her, and decided to turn around and look at me and let me know he meant business. We locked eyes, then bam. (James claps). Car pulled out in front of us and we hit it - full speed, no brakes. I came to and my dog was clawing the shit out of me, trying to climb out. It leaped out of a broken window and got run over by a passing car. Sam didn't have a scratch on him. Dad died. Mom stayed in the hospital for weeks - major head trauma and a broken arm. You wouldn't know any of it from reading that article though.

Rob is overlooking the article while listening.

JAMES (CONT'D)

It only talks about the infant from the other car - How it flew out the window and into the field - like something out of a tall tale. He lived though. (beat) My dad didn't. No mention of that.

ROB

You need let this shit go.

JAMES

But if I had just stopped playing...

(CONTINUED)

ROB

You would have hit that car anyway.

JAMES

He was a good driver. He could have swerved or hit the brakes.

ROB

It ain't your fault that the idiots in the other car pulled out in front of you.

JAMES

I know that, but it is my fault that my dad couldn't do anything about it.

ROB

Okay, let's say it is your fault. Why would you still play music at all?

JAMES

I don't know.

ROB

If you murdered your father by making him run into a other car simply because you played your music - Then its my expert opinion that you need to stop playing music. I'm surprised a goddamn tanker truck hasn't come barreling through your living room every time you pluck a string.

James gets up and walks away from Rob.

JAMES

Don't fuck with me right now.

Rob gets up and follows.

ROB

You hear how crazy you sound? I can't be the first person to tell you that you're crazy for thinking any of that was your fault.

JAMES

I could have made a difference in that moment.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Isn't that life, though? You make thousands of decisions in a day. There's no going back on any of those. You've got to learn to accept it.

JAMES

I just want that one decision back.

James closes his eyes as tears squeeze through.

ROB

There's no one in existence that would blame you for that. You gotta believe that. The sooner you start letting people hear you play, the sooner you'll finally forgive yourself.

INT. RESTAURANT - SAME NIGHT

James, Sam, and Laura are at dinner.

LAURA

You didn't leave out any details?

SAM

That sounded like everything.

JAMES

I told him everything. But he's right. It's not my fault.

SAM

Of course its not. You thought that? You never told me that.

JAMES

It makes sense. I never took dad's protest seriously til after the accident.

SAM

I'm sorry I never put the two together. The money from that settlement made me go a little crazy. A fifteen year old should never be allowed access to that kind of cash.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

It's not your fault. It's no one's fault. I need to keep telling myself that.

LAURA

Yeah.

JAMES

(To Sam)

Is it okay to borrow the car tomorrow?

SAM

For sure man.

JAMES

I'm heading back there for a "special session". (beat) But let's change the subject to something less depressing. Still seeing that girl?

LAURA

Ooh, who's the lucky lady?

SAM

Yeah, but we don't need to talk about that. But, if you must know, I'm seeing her tonight.

JAMES

Its kind of late, huh?

LAURA

Who is she?

SAM

Her name is Miranda. We meet at my group meetings. Heh, she's a fun one.

JAMES

Not too fun, though.

SAM

Get off my nuts; She's a nice girl.

LAURA

When do we get to meet her?

(CONTINUED)

SAM

I'll bring her around sometime.
James's met her. I wish he'd give
her a chance.

JAMES

I only spoke up because of your
vow.

SAM

Yeah, yeah, my vow, my vow. I'm
sick of being alone. I want
something like the two of you have.
Now I can't go back and get engaged
to my junior high sweetheart, but I
can start something now with
someone who knows where I'm coming
from. She's got a night planned for
us. Its nice to look forward to
something again.

LAURA

She sounds sweet.

JAMES

Yeah. I happy for you.

SAM

Yeah, thanks.

More later?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

James is riding his bike around town, delivering newspapers
as he does. He arrives a pole covered in flyers. In front is
a Chelere poster, promoting Curt's band. It even says
"featuring the music of James Chelere". This makes him
smile. He takes his phone out of the crate and takes a photo
of the flyer. He rides on.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

James arrives at Sam's place. Miranda's car in parked
nearby. Sam's keys are in the front door of the house. James
unlocks the door, removes them, and enters.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME DAY

James walks into an empty place. No breakfast has been made. No coffee in the pot. James leans at the bedroom door to talk through it.

JAMES

Hello? I'm stealing your car!

The door opens just enough for Miranda to squeeze her face through. She covers herself up, and she looks like she hasn't slept in days. They talk to each other the way you do when someone is sleeping in the other room.

MIRANDA

Shhh. We had a late night, he's still asleep.

JAMES

I just need to ask him if I can borrow the car.

MIRANDA

Just take it, I'll drive him if he needs to go somewhere.

James doesn't like this answer.

JAMES

I need to ask him something else.

MIRANDA

We're not dressed and he sleeps like a rock.

James looks at the door, then back at her.

JAMES

Yeah, he does. You're sure you can take him to work? I know he's suppose to work later.

MIRANDA

He walks to work.

JAMES

Well just make sure he gets up in time.

MIRANDA

I will, just go.

Miranda closes the door. James watches it close. He jiggles the keys in his hand, then walks out.

EXT. OUTSIDE ROB'S HOME, STREET - SAME DAY

James gets out of his car. He approaches Rob's house as Rob comes out with James's guitar case.

JAMES
What the hell is this?

ROB
Road trip. Come on.

James walks up to his own car.

ROB (CONT'D)
Nope, we're taking mine.

INT. ROB'S CAR - SAME DAY

Rob drives, James is in the passenger seat.

ROB
What's new with you?

JAMES
Sam's been seeing this girl that isn't right for him.

ROB
That's a shame. But I asked about you. Missing your guitar yet?

JAMES
I get by.

ROB
You're suppose to be missing it.
It's part of the damn exercise.
Doesn't work if you don't miss it.

JAMES
Fine, I miss it.

ROB
Good. Cause you get to play today.
And hopefully I'll get to hear what all the fuss is about.

Rob parks the car.

JAMES
Where are we?

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Your first gig.

Rob hops out of the car, opens the back door and slides the case out. James remains in the car. Rob motions for him to get out. James remains. Rob holds up his key and presses the panic button. The car begins honking loudly til James gets out.

EXT. OUTDOOR CONCERT AREA

The planned location is the LSU Greek Theater. On stage is a guitar and a fold out chair. Focus pull onto James and Rob, who are at the top of the stairs as they make their way down.

JAMES
I can't play here.

ROB
Why not?

JAMES
It's too much, too soon.

ROB
No one's here.

JAMES
But people can come by any moment.
It's just too open.

Rob jumps on stage, turns around and puts his hands on his knees while he talks down to James.

ROB
You've been passing up moments all your life. You need to get up here. Don't pass *this* moment. If someone walks by during it, then the two of you will have a shared moment.

Rob brings his two index fingers together to show "shared". Then, he extends a hand out to James.

ROB
If you don't get up here now, then you'll be wasting my afternoon, no one gets anything, and you will have robbed those people of a beautiful moment.

James is unsure.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Get the fuck up here.

Rob pulls James up, then jumps down. James approaches the guitar and rests a hand on it. Rob sits front and center.

ROB
Open the case, get your shit.

James sits.

ROB
Go on. You know what to do.

James sits for a moment, visibly nervous. No one is around.

James slowly closes his eyes, then strums a first note, then a next, and a next. He begins to pick and strum an array of notes. This begins the song RISE, giving us a taste of it. As he gets into it, his eyes open and he grabs the neck of the guitar to stop the sound.

A glimpse of his father in the audience.

ROB
You're not as bad I thought. Why'd you stop?

JAMES
That's the end of the song.

Rob stands up and makes his way back to the stage.

ROB
The end needs work.

Rob holds out his hand to help James down. James accepts and leaps off the stage.

ROB
I think we broke through a wall today, what do you think?

James nods, then smiles in agreement.

INT. SAM'S CAR - SAME DAY

James is visibly happy and proud of himself while driving. He takes out his phone and makes a call to Laura.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Laura. You have time to talk? This guy Rob, I feel like he's really making a difference. I played in public. I know! It felt great. Well, I can tell you all about it... Let me take you out tonight. Yeah, just meet me at my place then. Love you. Bye.

James ends the call.

EXT. SAM'S RENTAL HOME - SAME DAY

James parks the car in Sam's driveway. He gets out of the car, tosses the keys up and catches them. Miranda's car is gone. James approaches the door and puts in the key.

JAMES

(Loudly)

Sam, are you here, or working?

He knocks on the door. No answer. He turns the key and enters.

JAMES

(Loud)

Hello-elo-elo-elo?

James opens Sam's fridge.

JAMES

He won't miss this.

James grabs a bottle of water. He takes out his cellphone and calls his brother. He hears the cellphone ring in the other room. He looks up at the door to Sam's room.

JAMES

You better not be skipping work.

James pushes open the bedroom door. The cellphone continues to ring. Sam is laying on his mattress, face-down, with a sheet covering him from his lower back to the back of his knees.

JAMES

You're suppose to be at work.

James ends the call and takes a drink as he watches his brother lie there. As he removes his lips from the bottle, he realizes he's not moving at all.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Sam?

James takes a slow step forward, then suddenly recognizes the situation and rushes to Sam, dropping the water bottle in the process.

JAMES

SAM!

James kneels down and flips Sam over. James knows he's been gone for a while. He lifts his neck up to give him a hug, then pulls away to look at his face.

JAMES

Sam... Please, no, Sam.

James buries his head onto Sam. Nearby there are pills by his sobriety coin. Que the music.

EXT. OUTDOOR FUNERAL - DAY

The music is "A Song For John".

A small group of well dressed friends and family are walking away from an even smaller group of people who remain at Sam's grave. As Miranda walks away with that group, James gives her a stone faced look. She looks like she fell hard off the wagon. Rob and Laura walk a small distance away with the group, then turn around to see James with a woman in the distance. Only the two of them remain at the grave.

ROB

Who is that James with over there?

LAURA

That's his mother.

James turns to the woman.

JAMES

(sign language)

[I love you. I've missed you.]

ROB

She's deaf?

LAURA

Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

But James said she was a fan of his music.

LAURA

His family was in an accident years ago. His dad died, but his mom lost her sense of smell and her hearing.

Cut to James and his Mother hugging from Rob's point of view.

INT. OPEN MIC NIGHT - NIGHT

James is on stage, finishing out the song. He is hammering out of the chords and singing with his eyes closed.

JAMES

But you don't have to see what you did to me and everyone who ever knew you // We miss you so greatly. Hope you miss us too. I promise you, we'll never forget you.

James opens his eyes. Tears that were held within finally fall down his face. We can see from his stone cold face that the crowd doesn't phase James at this point in time.

EXT. DOORWAY OF JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - DAY

Knocking sound carries over from the last scene to this scene. Several repetitions later, James opens the door to reveal Rob.

JAMES

I said I didn't want to come by this week.

ROB

And you're still not coming by.

JAMES

I just don't want to talk to anyone.

ROB

Well, I'm here. May as well talk to me.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Go home, Rob.

ROB
The only way you're getting me off
of this floor mat is by inviting me
in. (beat) Care to challenge that?

JAMES
No. Come in.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME DAY

Rob walks in, then immediately begins checking out the lyric
sheets covering most of the walls. He also notices a
different guitar on the couch.

ROB
What's this guitar doing here?

JAMES
That's the one I keep at Laura's.

ROB
Cheatin' son of a bitch.

JAMES
So what are we going to talk about?

ROB
This is a friendly visit.

Rob points at the walls all around.

ROB (CONT'D)
This is exactly how I imagined your
place would look like.

JAMES
Cut the crap. We're not friends.

ROB
We aren't? You don't pay me, James.
You come to my place and we chat.

JAMES
Still doesn't make us friends.

ROB
I might be the *only* friend you've
got.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I don't need friends. Is that why you gave out free therapy? To find new friends? Social media too complicated for you?

ROB

I'm not going to fight you on this. I came by to see how you were doing. I may not be your friend, but you are a friend to me. You can snap at me all day, but you'll discover that I'm a fucking rock.

JAMES

I'm sorry.

ROB

I met Laura at the funeral. We're in contact now. She told me you played in public.

JAMES

(sarcasm)

Aren't you proud?

James smirks.

ROB

Can you do it again?

James's smirk disappears.

ROB (CONT'D)

Yeah, I didn't think so. (long beat) Sam died, James.

JAMES

I'm aware.

ROB

When your father died, you closed up. And when Sam died - You opened right back up. But you're not the same person that was on stage. You've begun healing, and person was raw, broken and bruised. How'd you feel?

JAMES

Empty. But sad and angry at the same time. I think the only reason I was able to get up there was

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (cont'd)
because of Sam. (beat) Like it was
the last gift he gave me.

ROB
He wanted you up there, and you
delivered. Now you gotta make it
the gift that keeps on giving.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

James and Laura have been boxing up things at Sam's place all day long. James walks out of the front door and carries a box to formerly Sam's car, which is now James's. He looks past the car and sees Miranda's car approaching the house. She parks her car next to his, then steps out.

MIRANDA
Hey. James, right?

JAMES
Why are you here?

MIRANDA
I didn't get a chance to talk to
you at the funeral. I'm really
sorry about Sam.

JAMES
I'm sure you are.

He pushes the box further into the car. Miranda comes around Sam's car, but still keeping a bit a distance.

MIRANDA
Hey, I really am. He was so sweet
to me. I never meet sweet guys.

James gives the box one last frustrated push, then stands aggressively, pointing at her.

JAMES
I should have told him to stay the
hell away from you. I should have
known he wasn't strong enough yet.

MIRANDA
I don't want to get into it. I'm
just here to pick up my CDs.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Screw your CDs. You killed him and all you can think about is your fucking CDs... I know to you that you were just getting your fix - getting high with him. But what you didn't know is that he's been through that for years. His body just couldn't take anymore.

MIRANDA

Its not like I planned any of this. We were just partying. I didn't know he couldn't take it.

JAMES

He was so delicate. He would have done whatever you asked of him just to keep you near.

Laura walks out to see the commotion.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I wish there was something I could do to you. But there is nothing in this world that will prepare you for the guilt you'll be feeling. I mean, you should feel it, but maybe you've lost your humanity. (beat) Maybe you don't feel the same things normal people feel. (beat) Maybe you lost that feeling a long time ago.

MIRANDA

You don't know me...

JAMES

Look at you. You're **nothing**.
There's no one to know!

James closes the car door and begins the walk back to the house. Miranda is ashamed.

MIRANDA

What about my CDs?

JAMES

You're not getting your goddamn CDs.

James walks into the house and Laura follows.

EXT. THE PARK - DAY

James finishes out a song. Rob sits nearby eating sunflower seeds, watching people walk by while James plays.

ROB

That's what progress sounds like.
But I hear your volume drop every
time someone walks by.

Rob tosses a seed in the air and attempts to catch it.

JAMES

I'm done for today.

ROB

It's only been twenty minutes.

JAMES

Isn't that long enough?

ROB

Oh, sorry, am I wasting your time?
Do you have to be somewhere? You're
on my time, and we still have forty
minutes left.

JAMES

I'm just not in the mood.

ROB

Persistence means reaching your
goals, even when you're not in the
mood.

JAMES

Who am I even doing this for now?

ROB

All the same people.

JAMES

But I can play in public now. Its
not a problem. I need to focus on
getting a real job.

ROB

What's the matter? Delivering
papers ain't paying what it used
to? I delivered papers when I was
ten, and I bought whatever the hell
I wanted to!

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I've got more to buy than comic books and action figures. And that's why we shouldn't be here wasting time.

James gets up, but Rob stops him from walking away.

ROB

Come on, hold up now. You're not doing this for nothing. You know, people get paid to do what you do. Haven't you ever dreamed to do more than just play in coffee shops?

JAMES

Yeah.

ROB

Well, there, see? No one ever made it up the mountain without taking the first step.

JAMES

I'm just trying to be realistic.

ROB

Screw realistic. If you want to do something with your life, do it. You gotta start by getting your name out there any way you can. Now sit back down.

James sits back down.

JAMES

I've got people getting my name out.

ROB

How so? Slipping business cards in the morning edition?

JAMES

That's not a bad plan, but no. My neighbor, Curt - his cover band is named "Chelere", after me.

ROB

Why the hell did he do that?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

They only play my songs.

Beat.

ROB

Your songs? You gettin' paid?

JAMES

No, but they just cover them.

ROB

Doesn't sound like a great way to get your name out. I think they come off as an original band, and you get left in the dirt. You should get some paperwork going to protect yourself.

JAMES

Why? I don't need paperwork to play a Bon Jovi at an open mic night.

ROB

You're not Bon Jovi. And you don't have a slew of lawyers at the ready. I know how it is with plagiarism. I've put stuff out there, and I've got documentation to protect that stuff. All you've got are scribbles in a notebook.

JAMES

It makes it seem like I don't trust him.

ROB

You've got no reason to trust him. He's not doing anything illegal right now since you've given him consent. Just get the paperwork done so that he'll know where your borders lie. Now come on, you've eaten up like ten minutes. Get back to playing.

JAMES

Fine.

James begins to play. Rob walks away, continuing to eat sunflower seeds. About seven seconds go by, the Rob spins around toward James pointing at him.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
(like an overeager fan)
Oh, I know that one! That's that
Chelere song, isn't it?

James face says "not funny".

EXT. STREET BY THE DAILY GRIND OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Laura and James are leaving the open mic night.

LAURA
I'm loving this change in you.

JAMES
Is it cool if we walk down to the
Spanish Moon and see Curt's band?

LAURA
Yeah. I don't have to be up in the
morning.

JAMES
Oh, really?

James winks as Laura giggles.

LAURA
I am really glad you decided to get
help. I'm seeing good changes in
you.

JAMES
I am too. But eventually it wasn't
an option anymore. After Sam died,
I couldn't go on hiding. I just
wish I would have realized it
sooner.

LAURA
Sam would be proud.

JAMES
Yeah, I know.

LAURA
Well, speaking of good change,
should I go for a job in San
Francisco or New Orleans?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

You got job offers? That's great!

LAURA

Yeah. Had more than just those two,
but I've boiled it down.

JAMES

So who pays more?

LAURA

Its about the same. It comes down
to which city we want to be in.

James thinks for only a moment.

JAMES

San Francisco then. I like the idea
of a big change.

LAURA

I'm so glad you didn't say New
Orleans. There's so much for more
for me with the job in San
Francisco.

James and Laura come to a stop as they wait for the light to
change.

JAMES

I can't wait. I just feel like its
a much needed change.

LAURA

Don't pack your bags yet, I still
have to work out the details.

They happened to be stopped at the wall where James got the
therapist's number. Now, instead of that other band's flyer
all over the wall, James's last name is now all over the
wall. "Chelere, formerly Red Light, playing downtown at
Spanish Moon."

LAURA (CONT'D)

James - What is all of this?

JAMES

Oh, this is Curt's band. Cool, huh?

LAURA

Are you in the band?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

No, they play my music - Like my own little cover band.

The light changes and the begin to cross.

LAURA

When did one song turn into a full blown cover band?

JAMES

When I decided to allow him to play a full set. Big stars have cover bands. Why not me?

LAURA

You're not a big star yet.

JAMES

I can play my own music still. Its just like they are out there getting the word out for me, so when I am recognized, people will be familiar with some of the material.

LAURA

And this doesn't worry you?

JAMES

I talked to Rob. I'm going to get paperwork done soon, even though I probably don't need it.

LAURA

Better safe than sorry.

JAMES

Curt seems like a good guy. Besides, its a Tuesday show. There'll be a handful of people there, and the band will just be having a good time with it all, nothing serious.

EXT. SPANISH MOON - SAME NIGHT

Just outside of the moon, Laura and James finally reach the door. There are a few people behind them.

(CONTINUED)

DOORMAN
How many?

JAMES
Two.

DOORMAN
Eighteen.

JAMES
I'm thirty.

DOORMAN
Nah, nine a piece to get in.
Eighteen bucks.

JAMES
Nine dollars? (beat) I'm James
Chelere.

DOORMAN
As in the band Chelere?

JAMES
Yeah.

DOORMAN
You're in the band?

JAMES
No, but the band is named after me.

DOORMAN
Why?

JAMES
I wrote the songs they play.

DOORMAN
Oh, alright. Eighteen bucks.

A short face off. A frustrated Laura reaches into the purse
and pays.

LAURA
Here's a twenty.

DOORMAN
Alright, I'll need to see ID.

This earns another ugly look from James.

INT. SPANISH MOON - SAME NIGHT

The crowd is alive here in the moon. Curt and the band are owning the stage. His song is barely recognizable, but it is his song. James and Laura can't believe the crowd that is here. Its packed. Curt sees James in the crowd and points at him.

CURT

Let's give it up for James Chelere!
Finally making it out here!

The crowd roars. James just wants to crawl in a hole. This many eyes on him is overkill.

But James changes from scared to upset when he sees that they didn't even notice him. They were cheering for the band. James looks back up to Curt owning the stage and making that song his own. Uh-oh.

LAURA

We can go. Let's go.

James looks at her and shakes his head. No. He needs to see this.

INT. SPANISH MOON - LATER THAT SAME NIGHT

The crowd has dispersed aside from a few groupies standing near the stage talking to Curt and the band. James and Laura are standing at the bar. This has become a drinking night for James. A man, GABE LARSON, approaches wearing casual attire, but everything about him is sharp and clean. James remains sober enough for regular conversation, though its showing gradually more and more.

GABE

Hey, sorry to interrupt - James:
Hi, I'm Gabe Larson.

Gabe holds out his hand.

JAMES

You're the only one that saw me.

Laura shakes Gabe's hand.

LAURA

I'm Laura.

(CONTINUED)

GABE

A pleasure, Laura. James, I was wrong about you. Your voice exists in your songwriting.

James is confused.

GABE (CONT'D)

That night that you were sitting behind your empty guitar case, I was heading out to check out a band called "Red Light". Is this your first show?

JAMES

Yeah, I didn't know they were so popular.

GABE

They were mediocre as Red Light, but when Curt joined up and you gave them your music...

Gabe "blows up" one of his hands.

GABE (CONT'D)

(Boom sound)

.

JAMES

So, you just stopping by to say hi?

GABE

That and I'm a fan of you and the band.

JAMES

You don't look like the rest of these people - staying out late away from their dorms.

GABE

I'm not from around here.

James takes another drink. Gabe hands James his card. It's an agent's card.

JAMES

You want to sign that band?

GABE

They're talented *and* intelligent, which is hard to find in a group

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GABE (cont'd)
these days. They're not just in it
for the booze and the loose women.
Also, they're a big deal locally,
and that'll translate nationally.

Gabe hands James a local magazine. "Who's who in Baton Rouge. Featuring the next best musicians, artists and writers." James holds on to it after seeing the cover page.

GABE (CONT'D)
I picked this up at the front door.
And this is just one example of the
buzz they're getting.

JAMES
But they're a cover band.

GABE
Only by definition. They dropped
all of those pop covers. They play
all original songs - your songs.
You and I know its a cover band,
but everyone else doesn't.

Curt approaches the conversation.

JAMES
They're playing my music though -
that makes them a cover band.

Gabe shakes Curt's hand with excitement.

GABE
Hey Curt, great show man!

LAURA
Great show, Curt.

CURT
Thank you, thank you. (to James)
This is the guy that makes it all
possible.

Curt puts his arm around James, but James violently shakes it off. The alcohol is more apparent now. James stands up and gets two arms distance between himself and the group.

JAMES
You never told me the band was this
big - This popular.

(CONTINUED)

CURT

What?

LAURA

James, calm down.

GABE

James, you don't seem to understand
- this is good for everyone. This
is gonna to change your life.

JAMES

Curt, what are you doing to me?

CURT

What do you mean?

JAMES

We never discussed all of this!

GABE

Look, how about we all sit down...

JAMES

No, Gabe, I'm not sitting down and
I'm not ready to talk to you. Those
are my words up there.

CURT

They are, James. Nothing's changed.

JAMES

My words. (shouting) I SHOULD BE
SAYING MY OWN WORDS! Not you. ME!

James points at Curt.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You're not allowed... No, I forbid
you to sing any of that again.

LAURA

James, stop!

Laura approaches James. As she does, he back away from her,
turns around and heads out. Laura follows.

CURT

James, come on!

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James sits in his apartment. It's dark, except for a light on the Who's who magazine he's reading. He reads the article about Curt's band, Chelere. Highlight a few sentences:

"Bad name, good band"

"No one in the band is named James Chelere"

"Music like this is what the world has been waiting for"

That kind of stuff. James, frustrated, flips through the book in anger. The pages fall onto a local writer named Rob Vincent. His next book, "You're not crazy. Everyone around you is" is due next year. "Moved to Baton Rouge and stayed for the people" "The people turned out to be the perfect writing inspiration".

INT. ROB'S HOME - DAY

James tosses the magazine onto the table in front of Rob.

JAMES
Magazine article. Page 36.

James sits down.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You're a "who's who".

ROB
Oh, that's a bad picture of me.

James leans in.

JAMES
Why did you lie to me?

ROB
Lie about what?

JAMES
Being a therapist.

ROB
Oh that. Well, its because I'm an author. Didn't you read the article?

James, feeling fragile, looks to and from at his hands and Rob while he talks.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I trusted you with a lot of information about me, Rob. I thought we were friends.

ROB

When you first walked in that door, we weren't anything. I didn't know what we'd end up being. I don't charge and at no point in time have I ever claimed to be a therapist. It's just good wordplay that people think that. You are one of the few people that I have really gotten to help, and helping you has been a pleasure, James, it has, and our time will more than likely end up in my next book. The part you're forgetting is that story could very well help someone. I feel like you got something valuable out of these sessions, so why do you feel betrayed?

JAMES

Without a confidentiality agreement, you're just some guy. And it's guaranteed that you will tell people about all of this.

ROB

I never use real names, and no one has ever discovered that I've written about them.

JAMES

I just discovered it.

ROB

Well, I'm sorry you found out.

James walks across the room and puts a hand on the top of the piano to support himself.

JAMES

I just feel worn out and lied to. Between everything with Sam, and Curt playing my music, I just have nothing left for you.

James turns to Rob.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Did something happen with that?

JAMES

This was going to end soon, anyway.
Laura is taking a job in San
Francisco, and I'm going with her.

ROB

That's great, James. But if you
need to talk about Curt...

JAMES

Goodbye, Rob.

James heads for the exit.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - DAY

James is walking up to his own door, but hears an acoustic guitar going on in Curt's apartment. James approaches Curt's door and knocks. The guitar stops, then Curt answers.

JAMES

Stop playing my music.

James walks away toward his apartment. Curt goes after him.

CURT

James, hold up. It doesn't have to
be like this.

JAMES

You're not even playing them right.

CURT

Why are you so mad about this? What
part of this upsets you?

James turns around, but doesn't have an answer.

CURT

This band is nothing without your
music AND you. I won't let you get
left behind.

JAMES

I just want to play *my own* music.

CURT

No one's stopping you from doing
that.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

But how can I play when you're out there doing the same songs?

CURT

You said it yourself that we're just a cover band and you're right.

JAMES

As a cover band with no rights to my music, you won't get signed.

CURT

I just want to play music. I happen to love your music, and the guys do to. If you don't want to let us record your songs, that's fine. Screw Gabe. I just really thought you'd like the recognition.

JAMES

Well you were wrong. Please, stop playing my music.

James goes back to his own apartment and enters, leaving Curt behind.

INT. DAILY GRIND - NIGHT

James gets done playing one of his own songs.

BARRY

That was James Cha-leer playing a song by one of our local favorites, Curt Cappele of Chelere!

James grabs the mic with anger.

JAMES

No, that's my song. My name is James Chelere.

BARRY

Okay, my mistake, James Chelere everyone!

INT. DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James is now sitting down listening to other musicians. He has a cup of coffee in front of him. Someone pulls out the chair at the same table. It is Gabe.

GABE

Good session up there.

Gabe sits down.

JAMES

I was saving that seat.

GABE

Curt mentioned to me that you don't want him playing your music anymore.

JAMES

That's right.

GABE

So who benefits from that?

JAMES

I do. I play my own music, no one else. Let me ask you this, Gabe. Why not sign me?

GABE

As a performer?

JAMES

Yeah.

GABE

You're okay, but I think this is where you belong when it comes to performance. Curt has star quality. It's a real thing, not just a term to describe the people on TV.

JAMES

But I can do it.

GABE

I do want to sign you - As a songwriter. Baton Rouge is getting a state of the art recording studio in the near future. We want this place to be the new haven for recording artists.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

A haven, huh?

GABE

We're going to have everything from A to Z, all in one place, just like Hollywood does for the film industry. You're going to be the one working with music artists from all over the world. It isn't a secret that you have talent. Curt believes in you, and no matter how much you push him away, he won't seem to let you go. You guys are a team, and you're team leader.

JAMES

What do you mean he won't let me go?

GABE

He's pushing for a two man deal. He won't sign anything til you agree to sign. But that's all just one side of the picture. There's lots of money to be made.

JAMES

How much money?

GABE

Lots. I'll be out of town for a few weeks, but call me between now and then and you can meet me at the temporary offices and go over the paper work. Think about it.

Gabe gets up and puts a twenty dollar bill on the table.

INT. ANOTHER VENUE - SAME NIGHT

Curt is sitting on the edge of the stage talking to fans. Other stragglers still remain. The sound guy is still in his booth, talking to a friend. James approaches the stage.

CURT

(to fans)

Hey, you guys have a good night.

Curt walks away from that group to approach James as he walks up.

(CONTINUED)

CURT (CONT'D)

Hey man.

JAMES

Sorry about my reaction at your place... at your show.

CURT

It's cool. I've stated my case.

JAMES

It wasn't clear how much you were sticking up for me. Gabe told me that he wanted to hire me to be a songwriter in that new studio, and its all thanks to you.

CURT

I think you'd be great at it.

JAMES

Yeah, I know. I think I'm going to take the job.

Curt gives him a handshake and pulls James in for the hug.

CURT

That's awesome man. We're gonna go a long way with all of this. I bet Laura was happy you won't be slinging papers anymore.

JAMES

I actually haven't told her yet. I came straight here.

CURT

It's a big decision. But I bet she'll be happy for you.

James thinks about San Francisco.

JAMES

(reassured)

There's a chance I may commute from New Orleans, but everything should work out.

CURT

You and me - we're going to change lives.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

You think so?

CURT

You gotta believe in yourself.
You've got power that you don't
even know about. So many
unfortunate people say that "its
just a song"; you listen and its
over. Next track. The fortunate
ones are the people who've fallen
on hard times, and they recognize
the power of a song to pull them
out of that tough spot. And that's
why mp3 players have repeat
buttons.

James laughs, smiles.

CURT (CONT'D)

When those people fall down, it'll
be *your words* that pick them back
up.

Curt gets up on the stage.

CURT (CONT'D)

I need a pick me up. Come on up
here.

James gets up on stage. Curt walks over to a guitar and
offers it to James.

CURT (CONT'D)

Do me the honor of playing "RISE".

JAMES

Now?

CURT

Yeah. Let's do it.

James begins to play "RISE" the way he knows how.

CURT (CONT'D)

Hold up, try it with solid chords
and pick it up about thirty beats.

JAMES

Really?

(CONTINUED)

CURT

Yeah. It's your song, but try it out.

James follows his advice, playing the same chord at a faster rate. The sound guy in the distance turns the speakers back on. Curt grabs the mic and begins to sing the lyrics to "RISE". They share a beautiful jam session. James watches Curt shine. He finally smiles watching Curt perform.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF LAURA'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

James is sitting on a bench with a smile. Things are finally working out for him. This news will be good for Laura. Laura exits the hospital. James stands up to meet her.

LAURA

What are you doing here? *****

James grabs his own arm.

JAMES

I'm injured!

LAURA

What?

JAMES

No, I'm kidding. I've got great news.

LAURA

(excited)

I've got news too.

JAMES

Oh? You go first then.

James motions to her to sit. She does, and he sits next to her.

LAURA

No, you drove all this way.

JAMES

Okay. So I talked to Gabe...

LAURA

That guy from the bar?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Yeah. He wants my music. And he wants me to be a staffed songwriter.

LAURA

But I thought you wanted to perform?

JAMES

I do, but I'm not made for it. And I can still play the Grind and other local places, and I think that's enough for me for now. I'm not ruling it out for the future. But I can sustain my needs with writing credits for now.

LAURA

Do you trust Gabe? Did you work out the details?

JAMES

I'm going to the temporary studio in a few weeks to sign all of the paper work. I'm going to read every line and make sure everything's as legit as he said it would be. So my news isn't really news til I sign those papers.

LAURA

I'm still proud of you. James Chelere, the paid writer.

Laura puts her hand on his face.

JAMES

Alright, alright, what's your news?

LAURA

I got the job in San Francisco!

JAMES

That's great, but judging from your reaction to my news, I figured you would have said New Orleans.

LAURA

You're getting a job as a writer. Why do you need to be here?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

They're bringing this big studio here and its going to have everything. I have to be there.

LAURA

You're the one that told me to choose San Francisco!

JAMES

That was before. What about the New Orleans job? Isn't that an option?

LAURA

I want San Francisco. There's so much for me there. Its a better position that pays more, and I'll be working with Dr. Allison Abrams.

JAMES

Who's that?

LAURA

He's the reason I got into medicine. He's not a famous musician or an actor, but those were never my kind of heroes. He's done wonders in the field of medicine. This is important to me.

JAMES

This job is important to me!

LAURA

You don't even have the job yet!

JAMES

I feel really good about it, and this is a huge opportunity for me.

Laura takes a deep breath, then speaks carefully.

LAURA

It is. And I think you'll be great at it. But I know I'll be great in San Francisco. And if I stay, I know I'll regret it, and a small part of me might even hate you for it. I don't want to do that to us.

JAMES

Okay then. I guess, good luck in San Francisco.

James get up and walks away.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Music begins to play. James is flipping through the pages of his notebook. He goes directly to a certain pages; stops. The music played mimics the lyrics on the page, and it's all about the day he met Laura. As the lyrics end, the music continues.

JAMES
Not for sale.

James carefully tears the sheet out from the notebook.

EXT. TEMPORARY STUDIO - DAY

Gabe and James are relaxing outside at a table after a tour. The building behind them is modern enough, but it is really just a business office with rented out space.

GABE
So what did you think of the plans
for the new studio?

JAMES
The plans are good.

GABE
Damn right, the plans are good.

JAMES
I'm not really a plans guy. So,
When do you see this all happening?

GABE
Probably the third quarter of next
year. They'll be breaking ground
next month. But don't worry about
that. You'll get started here right
away working with Curt and a few
other local talents. The big
artists won't show up if the locals
aren't any good.

JAMES
Why should that matter?

GABE
Artists love culture. That's why
cities like Austin thrive. People
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GABE (cont'd)
all want to be a part of the fun. I want to make that happen in Baton Rouge. We're the splash that starts the wave.

JAMES
And you think that's possible?

GABE
I do. I wouldn't be here talking to you if I didn't. Baton Rouge has its problems, but if we make enough of a presence here, someone in charge of the clean up around here will decide its worth saving.

JAMES
I think this will be the start of a good thing... It has to be.

GABE
It is. So let's get some papers signed and get you working.

INT. TEMP STUDIO OFFICE - SAME DAY

James is thumbing through legal papers. Gabe is scrolling through his phone. They sit with a desk between them.

JAMES
This can't be right.

GABE
It's all the standard paperwork.

JAMES
But it specifically states that I won't be credited as the writer.

GABE
You'll be a writer here at the studio like I told you. But no, you won't be credited in association with the artist.

JAMES
Well, what the hell is that about?

Gabe puts down the phone.

(CONTINUED)

GABE

People are really digging on the singer/songwriter front man these days. You mix that with Curt's stage presence and you've got a really explosive package.

JAMES

This can't be the standard paperwork. It's not right. I want to be credited for my life's work!

GABE

There are thousands more like you in cities like New York and Los Angeles, and they'd kill to get a job as a working writer. This is our standard deal. You're only in here because I need to work with Curt. Curt wouldn't come along unless you did.

JAMES

Then I'm not signing this.

GABE

Curt signed his papers this morning. It doesn't matter now, but you've got great music. I'm not going to lie to you about that. But the truth is, those thousands of other people waiting for their shot have great music too. You seriously can't believe that you're unique...

JAMES

So you just want me to be a faceless part of this company?

GABE

You make it sound so drab. We just need to give the written by credits to our artists. Behind closed doors, they know the truth - where the real talent is. And you'll get compensated heavily for it.

JAMES

What about the band name? People will know I'm involved.

(CONTINUED)

GABE

No offense, but that name is godawful. Doesn't really fit the band image. Besides, you and Curt are the only ones signing anything long term with us. The rest of the band is coming on board for now, but who knows if they can keep up.

JAMES

If I sign this, my name disappears from the picture completely and you get all of the music I currently own?

GABE

Yes, but you leave out the bigger picture - You will get payment. A big payment. More and more for every song you write. I'm sure you and Laura can use that money.

JAMES

What do you mean?

GABE

Money like this jump starts lives. Down payments on a house, a car... a ring. Hell, you could buy a ring with what we're offering. You got plans to marry that girl?

JAMES

Yeah.

GABE

Well now you can move on with those plans. I can't believe I have to talk you into this. Curt couldn't wait to sign.

JAMES

You signed Curt, so do you really want me to keep writing for you or do you just want my songs for Curt?

GABE

I would like you to bring new things to the table and being Curt's voice in the future. But if you only sold us your songs, then I'd be satisfied. Do you not want the job?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

No, I want the job, but I want to keep my music *my music*.

GABE

That's just not in the cards, James. Here's your options. Sign this paper here - which gives us your collection you showed Curt. Sign this paper back here, we get your songs and we'll work with you while you get new material.

James thinks, shaking nervously.

JAMES

I need to think about this.

GABE

Come on James, we're here. Let's just get this done with.

JAMES

Please, let me think about this. It may look like poorly planned, poorly written stanzas to you, but these are pieces of my life documented the only way I know how. You're asking me to let someone else pretend to live parts of my past. Its not something I'm going to decide on in an afternoon.

GABE

Okay James. I'll give you til the end of the week. You give me a call by then, otherwise, I'll fly some broke, eager songwriter out from Los Angeles who doesn't mind trading some words for a paycheck.

INT. DAILY GRIND - NIGHT

James briskly makes his way to the announcer across the room, putting his guitar down in the process.

BARRY

Hey James. Playing tonight?

JAMES

Yeah Barry.

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

Alright. I'll get you in there.

Cut to:

INT. TABLE AT DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James is sitting at a table with his head buried in his arms. A man approaches him and puts a hand on his shoulder.

ROB

I'm here to see James Chay-leer
play, have you heard of him?

James digs his head out from his arms looking up at Rob.

JAMES

Oh. Hey.

ROB

You look completely worn out.

Rob sits down at the table.

JAMES

If I tell you why, are you going to
write about it?

ROB

Depends on the content. There could
be some good material there. (beat)
No, I'm not. Believe it or not, I
do enjoy helping people get through
their problems.

JAMES

I've been asked to sell all of my
songs to get a job writing more
songs.

ROB

I guessed they offered enough money
to create a problem in your mind.

JAMES

Yes, plus the potential to make
even more.

ROB

And the other choice is do nothing,
keep your music, and continue
delivering papers?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

That sums it up.

ROB

Say you keep the songs. What are you going to do with them?

JAMES

Play them. Go places with them.

ROB

You've signed up for another night of performing open mic. This isn't the best life for your music. I'm not walking in your shoes, but you have to strike while the iron is hot. If I never wrote my first book, I never would have helped the people I've helped. I never would have met you and helped you along. Not to mention, I would be very poor and probably working the bar over there. (beat) What does Laura say in all of this?

JAMES

She doesn't say anything. She took a job in San Francisco.

ROB

She's already in San Francisco?

JAMES

Yeah, she left over a week ago.

ROB

So why aren't we discussing *that*?

JAMES

She's gone, and if I take this job here, I can't be there. This is an opportunity that I may never get again. It's a life changer. Sam would have wanted me to succeed with my music.

ROB

Not like this.

JAMES

This is how it all works. Look, I'm not happy about it, but there are songwriters, and there are

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (cont'd)
performers. That's it. A lucky few
get to be one of those, and the
extremely lucky get to be both.

ROB
But you are both.

JAMES
But I'm not successful at it.

ROB
I know you want to come out of this
with something. So would you rather
be successful with this job, or
would you rather be happy - in San
Francisco?

James takes his guitar, picks it up.

JAMES
I can have both. If it'll help
people, write my story. Let people
know I chose to be happy and
successful.

James runs out of the front door in front of the announcer.

BARRY
Look, Chu-leer-ree's running away
again!

The audience laughs and claps.

ROB
(Shouting to James)
I didn't need your permission!

Rob smiles, clapping.

EXT. IN JAMES'S CAR - SAME NIGHT

James tosses his guitar in, then sits down. He pulls out his
cellphone and makes a call.

JAMES
Mister Gabe. I'm ready to deal.

INT. JAMES'S CHEAP, YET TIDY APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James pulls down all of the art and papers and everything off the walls and puts them all into a plastic garbage bag. He picks up "Laura's Song" off a desk, then puts it back down.

JAMES
Still not for sale.

INT. TEMP STUDIO - SAME NIGHT

James, bag in hand, walks down the hall of the temporary studio.

INT. TEMP STUDIO OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

James drops the bag on the table.

GABE
What's this?

JAMES
It's my life in a bag. Every song
I've ever written.

GABE
You don't have this on a flash
drive?

JAMES
Take it or leave it.

GABE
I'll take it if you're ready to
sign.

JAMES
Got the check?

GABE
For your whole collection.

Gabe slides the papers forward along with the check.

GABE
(as James finishes signing)
We're gonna make some great music
with your songs James...

James finishes signing, takes the check, and walks out immediately. Gabe stands up.

(CONTINUED)

GABE

Hold up!

Gabe looks over the paper work.

GABE

(disappointed, not mad)

Ah, James, damnit...

Gabe walks into the hallway and turns to see James leaving the building. Fade to black.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT A DIFFERENT OPEN MIC NIGHT BAR - NIGHT

It's dark backstage here. James looks at his phone. New voice mails. He listens. It's Gabe.

GABE

It's Gabe. I still haven't heard from you. I understand you don't want the job, but I was hoping you'd reconsider because you got some really good stuff here James. I mean, some of its strange, but overall...

James hangs up the phone.

JAMES

(to himself)

They're all yours.

ANOTHER ANNOUNCER

(to James)

Okay, you're up. Just introduce yourself.

James emerges through the curtain to a very light audience. Low volume applause. James takes a seat.

JAMES

Hi.

Cut to Laura in the crowd. Smiling, so proud.

JAMES

My name is James Chelere. This is my first time here. My first week in San Francisco.

James takes a brief moment to see the new faces. Then, he leans slightly into the mic.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
This is a new one.

END.